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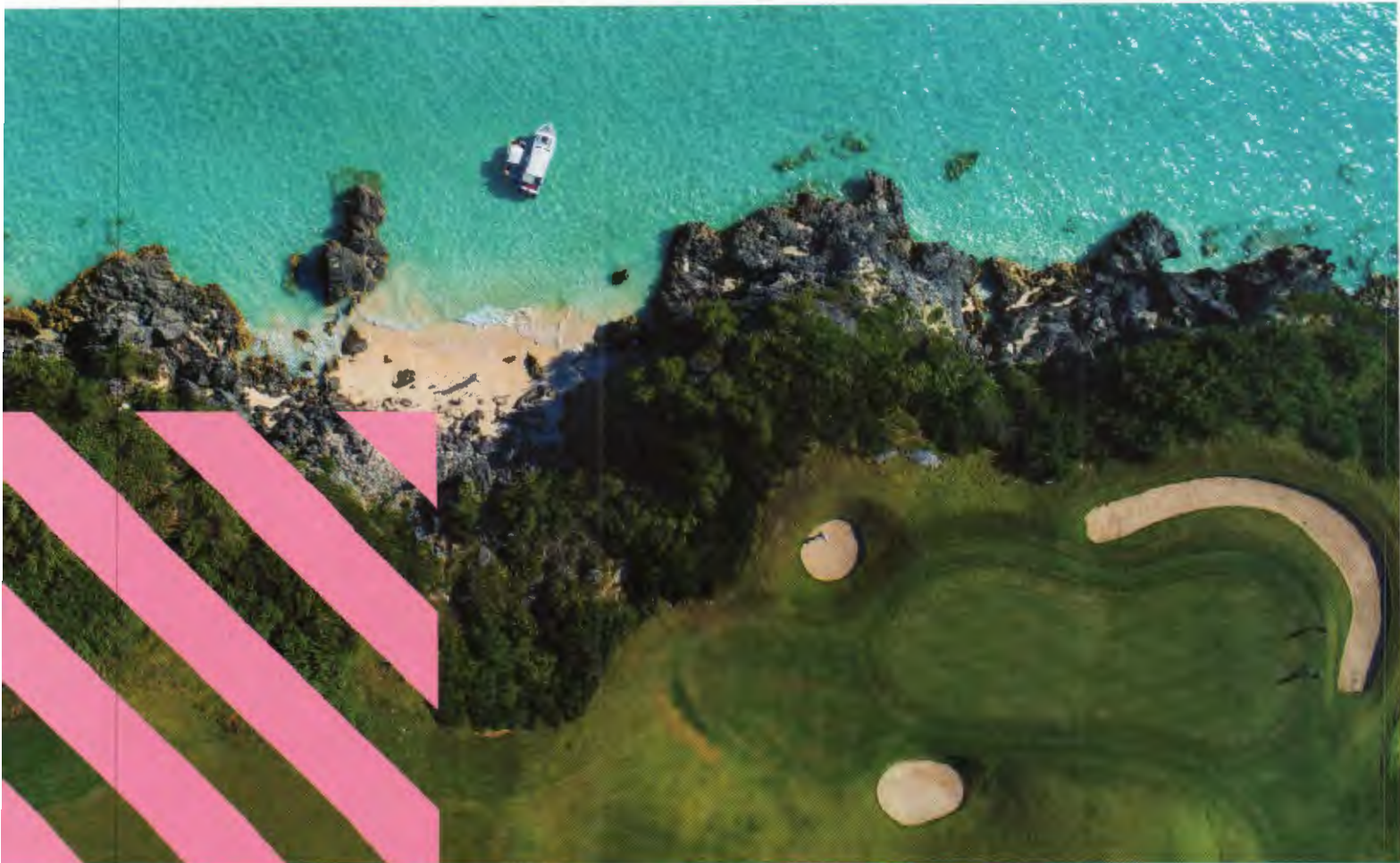
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Time to Thrive

HOW MYOS CANINE MUSCLE FORMULA GIVES DOGS OF ALL AGES A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

When it comes to health and wellness, it's often the simplest solutions that make the greatest difference, from a bit of daily exercise to a change in your diet. For dogs, the same idea rings true: One simple change can make a world of difference. That's the beauty of MYOS, a Fortetropin supplement supporting healthy dogs at every stage. Naturally derived from fertilized egg yolks, the formula was clinically proven in trials at Kansas State University to build and sustain muscle while promoting resilience and longevity, equipping pups with the strength—and the joy—to take on anything.

Perhaps no one understands this better than certified canine athlete specialist Lauren Zimmerman. The South Carolina-based fitness and agility trainer moonlights in an orthopedic clinic, and through her two careers, she's mastered the needs of healthy, active dogs. Three of her own, after all, are agility champions. "I treat them like professional athletes, because they really are," she says. Not unlike human athletes, Zimmerman's dogs and others she coaches perform at a high level, meaning time for recuperation is equally crucial. Be it competition season or off time, Zimmerman relies on MYOS to keep their muscles strong and resilient. After she incorporated the supplement, her dogs saw increased stamina and improved recovery time, keeping them close to competing shape all year. "I'm a huge advocate for MYOS because it's so obviously beneficial, and not just for dogs as active as mine," she says.

Zimmerman recommends the product to clients with senior dogs, as well as dogs undergoing surgery or physical therapy. Reducing the rate of muscle loss that often comes with aging, MYOS can help older dogs continue activities they love with lowered risk, improving bone, cognitive, and optical health in the process. It also reduces recovery time after injury or exertion, meaning dogs (and their owners) can sooner get back to the routines they love, be it running through fields, jumping off docks, or retrieving birds on the sporting ground. At the end of the day, the value is immeasurable from a product that grants families the greatest gift of all: more quality time with the dogs they love.

From top: Lauren Zimmerman's border collie Dublin; Zimmerman and Dublin competing together at an agility trial; MYOS, powered by Fortetropin, has benefits for dogs of all activity levels.

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"I'm a huge advocate for MYOS because it's so obviously beneficial, and not just for dogs as active as mine"





DiBenedetto, his Boykin spaniel (Pritchard), and his Lab (Story) mug for photographer Vincent J. Musi.

Ready for a Close-Up

INSIDE OUR COVER SHOOT, AND A FEW TRICKS FROM
A PHOTOGRAPHER WITH A NOSE FOR DOGS

According to Vincent J. Musi, a photographer who specializes in animal portraiture and has shot everything from a honeybee to an elephant for *National Geographic*, there are secrets to getting every animal to look its best. For a series of in-your-face portraits of big cats, for instance, an assistant held up raw beef on a stick to get just the right look from a lion at the Houston Zoo. But the snow leopard wasn't such an easy mark. "I discovered I had to sing to it," Musi says, "a cross between Frank Sinatra and Elvis Costello."

When it comes to photographing dogs (Musi's main focus these days), the bag of tricks is less complicated: squeaky balls, plush animals, and an oversize pack of bacon-flavored treats. His secret weapon, however, is his wife, Callie Shell. An accomplished photographer in her own right (her career has included work for *Time* and CNN as well as a stint as a White House photographer), she's known as the dog whisperer around the pair's Unleashed Studio in Charleston, South Carolina. If there was ever a set of bona fides for a duo to shoot the annual *G&G* dog cover, this was it.

The cover model herself resulted from a phone call with John Burrell of High Adventure Company, which

sends folks on sporting trips around the globe. That's when I heard about Chesapeake (Chesa for short), a year-old German shorthaired pointer belonging to Brent Altaffer, who helps manage the sporting grounds and guides quail hunters at Barnsley Resort outside of Atlanta. Not only is Chesa a beautiful, athletic GSP, she's one heck of a bird dog. This winter she'll be logging up to five days a week in the quail woods. And while Chesa loves being in the field, she's equally at home in Altaffer's bed. "She'll sleep all morning if you let her," he says.

I thought Chesa would be the perfect dog to lead off our sporting issue. After her session in front of Musi's lens, we had a little fun with my own pack, Pritchard (an eleven-year-old Boykin spaniel) and Story (a two-year-old Lab). Pritch was a sucker for the snacks, and Story was all tennis ball. But what I most enjoyed was watching Musi and Shell, two masters in action. If you enjoy snapping pics of your own pups, take a shot at doggy photographer fame in our annual Good Dog Photo Contest at gardenandgun.com/goooddog. Just be sure to bring the bacon treats!

DAVID DiBENEDETTO

Senior Vice President & Editor in Chief

Mail-Order Meat

A Kentucky source for top-quality beef

I love trips to my local butcher (especially for a teres major cut), but recently I received a box of American-raised Wagyu beef from Kentucky's Black Hawk Farms and put it to the test. We grilled the outside skirt steak and served it with a panzanella with local heirloom tomatoes, and the results had both our kids and our guests digging in for more. We also used the company's ground beef to make simple sliders in a cast-iron skillet, and the buttery flavor blew us away. A longtime supplier to restaurants, the farm has just recently started shipping its humanely raised beef to the public. It's one of the tastier packages you can get in the mail.



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Adrian Miller

WRITER

Among the many titles Adrian Miller has held throughout his career—James Beard Award-winning culinary historian, attorney, staffer to President Bill Clinton and then Colorado governor Bill Ritter Jr.—perhaps the tastiest is his gig as a certified barbecue judge. “I always think of barbecue as communal food,” he says. “It brings people together for the best of times.” He is currently working on a book about the history of African American barbecue, tentatively titled *Black Smoke*, and for “Pit Boss” (p. 55), Miller interviewed the pitmaster Derrick Walker of Smoke-A-Holics BBQ in Fort Worth. Through all of Miller’s hands-on research, one dish reigns. “Spareribs,” he says, “are my touchstone.”

“I think of barbecue as communal food. It brings people together for the best of times”

—Adrian Miller, who interviewed Texas pitmaster Derrick Walker, p. 55



Jared Soares

PHOTOGRAPHER

The more time he can spend with a subject, the better the pictures, says the D.C.-based photographer Jared Soares, who has shot for the *Atlantic*, the *New Yorker*, and *National Geographic*. So when he met the Virginia furniture makers Jomo Tariku and David Bohnhoff (p. 82), he was delighted that the dialogue flowed freely. “We found all these things we had in common,” Soares says, including that he and Tariku both attended the University of Kansas and Bohnhoff shares his deep interest in the Central Virginia art scene. “It didn’t feel like a photo session, but like three people hanging around, just having a conversation.”



Shani Raine Gilchrist

WRITER

Typically, Shani Raine Gilchrist’s vegetable garden in Columbia, South Carolina, overflows this time of year. “But my okra and cucumbers are the only things doing well at the moment,” she says. “My fourteen-year-old is happy about it, though. He says he picked so many tomatoes last year, it gave him nightmares.” She found much-needed solace in her trip to the topiary artist Pearl Fryar’s garden in Bishopville (p. 132). “The garden is so wonderful and peaceful,” says the writer, whose work has appeared in the *Washington Post* and the *Daily Beast*. “And Pearl himself has this quiet, powerful gumption. We need more of that in the world.”



Steve Russell

WRITER

Despite being what he calls an “after-school hunter” (“That means I’ll hunt whatever I don’t have to get up at four in the morning for,” he explains), the writer Steve Russell felt right at home visiting with master decoy carver Cameron McIntyre on Virginia’s Eastern Shore (p. 110). “His house is the kind of place that to get to it, you turn left, then right, then right again, then look for the oak tree, and drive through two rows of corn,” Russell says. “McIntyre’s made himself a world out there.” Russell, who has written for *Life* and *Rolling Stone*, lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he published *Edible Blue Ridge* magazine for eleven years.



AJ Frena

ILLUSTRATOR

“Animals were the first thing I started drawing,” says AJ Frena, who began sketching as a child growing up in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. “But this was my first time drawing a turkey.” The Pittsburgh-based illustrator depicted a headstrong Osceola hen and two adoring gobblers for “Boss Hen” (p. 106). “I’ve always liked scientific illustrations, and I love magical realism in literature, so I put that into my work,” Frena says. The illustrator has created pieces for brands such as Nike and Moda Operandi, and artwork for movie and series posters including those for Marvel’s *Avengers: Endgame* and Disney’s *The Mandalorian*.

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"My mother would yield to no substitute for watermelon rind pickles in her chicken salad"

SIMPLE PLEASURES

"Happy as a Mudlark" (August/September 2020) brought back so many wonderful memories of my adventures with my eighty-two-year-old mom doing the "Sanibel Stoop" along the Thames. I never knew that our digging in the mud had a term.

Faryl Hart

Richmond, Virginia

Great article about my favorite fish as a young boy in the 1950s ("River of Roosters," August/September 2020). At daylight, my brother and I would set up half a dozen cane poles on forked sticks in the Waccamaw River, and before all the rods were baited, one would go off with a longear sunfish. Around lunchtime, my dad would pull out a cast-iron skillet and fry up a mess of them, and we'd have a loaf of Merita bread and a Pepsi to go with them.

Ron Hickman

Blairsville, Georgia

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I'm smelling spices from simmering pickled watermelon rind while sipping a peach julep ("Southern Recipe Revival," August/September 2020). It makes living in the time of plague more bearable.

Christine Pietrandrea

Lexington, Kentucky

My mother would yield to no substitute for watermelon rind pickles in her chicken salad. Exploding with complex flavors, this recipe ("Southern Recipe Revival," August/September 2020) is above the

memories I have of the sweet surprise nestled among the chicken and almond slivers. Thanks so much for making a new memory, which I will pass down to my daughters.

Gina Haney

Mountain View, California

My wife spent all day making that cover cake (August/September 2020), and then I accidentally left the dog inside. He ate it off the counter, and I had to pretend it was me.

Josh Meaders

Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

GOOD GUYS

I was never a big fan of short stories—until I read Ron Rash ("The Blue-Collar Bard," August/September 2020).

Vickie Elswick

Greenup, Kentucky

Walton Goggins's character on *Justified* (Interview, August/September 2020) will go down as one of the best bad guys on television.

Gabrielle Glenn

Florence, South Carolina

CRAVING CROQUETTES

I learned to make salmon croquettes from my great-aunt (End of the Line, August/September 2020). Hers, too, were cone shaped. I hadn't eaten them in a couple of years, but after reading Roy Blount Jr.'s recollections, I made them for dinner that same night.

Sir Terrence Hummel

Orlando, Florida

Social Chatter

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AND BEYOND



WE ASKED...

To devein or not to devein shrimp?

A recent gardenandgun.com story got readers fired up about whether or not to remove the dark, gritty line along a shrimp's back.

Deveining is just a waste of shrimp-eatin' time. **Mike Burch**

Once you know what the line is, you can't unknow it. **Mark Richard**

It will not kill you, otherwise I would be dead long ago. **J Robin Hall**

It's just terror. **@glotoriousc**

My back hurts when I am through deveining, but it is so worth it. **Christine Eklund**

If it bothers you, add some hot sauce and chase it with a shot of whiskey! You'll be fine. **Carlos Del Valle**

For little bitty shrimp, I don't, but for jumbo Gulf shrimp, oh, yes. **Micheline Maynard**

How many beers have you had? That is the real question. **Glen Ward**

If you are old enough to eat them, you are old enough to peel and clean them yourself. **Sherry Shelton**



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Jonathan Green

ARTIST AND ADVOCATE

THE FORCE BEHIND COUNTLESS PROJECTS, ARTIST JONATHAN GREEN USES HIS WORK AND HIS VOICE TO PAINT A RICHER PICTURE OF THE HOLY CITY

A celebrated painter of the Southern experience, artist Jonathan Green is as much a part of the Lowcountry as it is a part of him. Inspired by a vivid well of childhood memories, his work captures vibrant, joy-filled images of Gullah life. “I’m proud to be not only a fine artist, but a regionalist,” he says. “In Charleston, the arts have always been elevated as a means of storytelling, and I’m lucky to be here at a time when people are so engaged.”

For Green, painting is just the tip of the iceberg—from designing the visuals for a Spoleto Festival USA production of *Porgy and Bess* to developing curriculum for area schools, Green is devoted to sharing Charleston’s deeper story. His role on the board at Middleton Place is just one way that mission shines—“It’s so important that when people visit this city, we tell as much of the story as possible,” he says. “Our location is an incredible asset because if we choose to be inquisitive,

the answers are all around us, in places like Middleton.” Today, visitors to the site and its gardens can experience a gracefully preserved history, its complexities brought clearly to light.

And the city is rife with Green’s contributions. As co-chair of the 2020 Charleston 350 Commemoration, he’s played a tremendous role in honoring the landmark anniversary, while his ongoing Lowcountry Rice Culture Project works with historians and cultural sites to elevate the legacy of the rice economy, a central though often overlooked piece of the Charleston narrative. Together with his partner, Richard Weedman, Green is also a prolific collector of African American art, an astonishing portion of which is on display at the Gibbes Museum of Art through January 10, 2021.

In all he does, Green exudes a love for Charleston. “Without a doubt, my favorite places are Middleton and the Gibbes Museum,” he says. “But on Monday nights, you can find me at my weekly soiree, enjoying a cocktail at the Charleston Place hotel.”

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See our friend Chirpy the Blue Jay at [SilverLinensJewelry](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) on Youtube ▶



TALK OF THE SOUTH

YOUR GUIDE TO SOUTHERN CULTURE



INTERVIEW

Man of Action

ETHAN HAWKE TAKES ON
THE FIERY ABOLITIONIST JOHN BROWN
IN A NEW MINISERIES

By Monte Burke

Hawke, photographed at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year.

If you stand for the Lord, the Lord will stand for you!" So bellows the abolitionist John Brown, as played by the Texas native Ethan Hawke in his starring role in the spirited Showtime miniseries *The Good Lord Bird*, which begins airing October 4. Hawke, the forty-nine-year-old four-time Oscar nominee, also executive produced the miniseries—which is based on the 2013 National Book Award-winning novel by James McBride—with, among others, his wife, Ryan, and Jason Blum (*Get Out*). ¶ *The Good Lord Bird* tells the story of Brown—played in a winning, full-throated manner by Hawke—as told by a fictional, formerly enslaved child named Onion. Freed by Brown, Onion joins him and his crew of abolitionists during the Bleeding Kansas confrontations in the late 1850s and follows him to the famous raid on the Harpers Ferry armory, after which Brown was captured, tried, and hanged, becoming the first U.S. citizen to be executed for treason. The tale is funny, thought-provoking, and, of course, very much pertinent to our historical moment. Here, Hawke shares his thoughts on why Brown's story resonates, the role of an artist, and how the South stays with him in everything he does.

What a time for this miniseries to air.

It's been intense. As I was doing research on John Brown, I came across a letter he wrote just before he was hanged. Someone had written him and told him he was sorry he was going to be hanged. And Brown wrote back, telling the man that it takes between six and nine minutes to die from hanging, and that he would do more for the abolitionist cause in those final minutes than he did in his entire life. If you think about that in the light of what happened to George Floyd and what the final minutes of Floyd's life have meant, it sends shivers down your spine. We're still reacting to events that happened so long ago. It's still going on. We filmed this in Virginia, and I stayed in Richmond and would walk along Monument Avenue and see the statues of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, and I was getting into character and thinking, *What would John Brown want to do to these statues?*

The statue situation is so interesting.

I'm a lover of history and prone to want our history to be respected, but it really is fascinating to see what and who we have chosen to honor. On the set of *The Good Lord Bird*, we wanted to get into the period mindset, so Christy Coleman, who ran the American Civil War Museum, came and spoke to us. Someone asked her about the Confederate statues, and she had a fascinating answer. She said that after the Civil War, the South suffered a great and terrible loss, not just lives and money, but a loss

of pride and self-esteem, and that these statues represent a society caught in the first stage of grief, which is denial. This is where I think John Brown comes in. When I was growing up, my parents divorced, and I went back and forth between homes. My mom was in Vermont, where they taught kids about John Brown, and my dad was in Texas, where they didn't. I found it really confusing. This country hasn't really looked at the truth of the Civil War and why it happened, and it's why race issues are on the front pages now.

Onion has a great line about Brown:

"Whatever he believed, he believed.

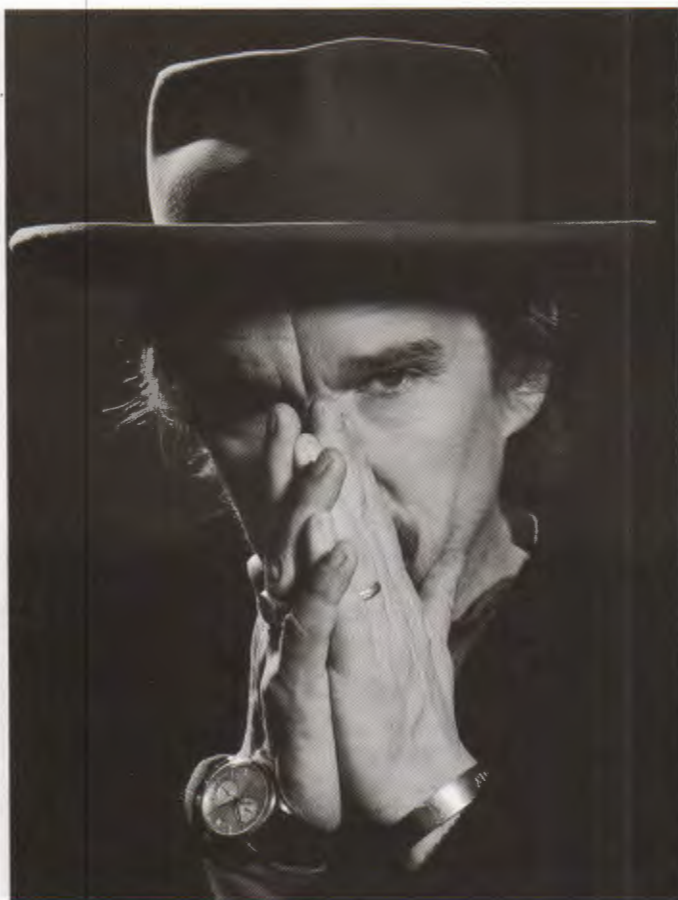
It didn't matter to him whether it was really true or not."

Brown is such a complicated figure, messianic or demonic, depending upon whom you ask, who believed that "the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood," as he wrote in his final letter.

I had a driver who took me to the set. One day he kind of whispered to me: "You're not doing a positive picture of John Brown, are you?" I said, "I don't know. Why do you ask?" And in truth, McBride's portrait of Brown is very human, nuanced, and complicated, not positive or negative. The driver then said, "Brown was a terrorist. He killed people." Well, Lee did, too, and so did all of those guys on Monument Avenue in what was, essentially, an insurrection against the United States. The genius of McBride's book is that he knows that

individuals are not to blame for what happened 150 years ago. He's not pointing fingers. But we're still caught in the web created by these old crimes. They're in our country's DNA. And [the hurts they caused] need to be healed. The trouble with telling stories about slavery is it can make people feel guilty and upset, and those two things usually turn to anger and rage, so many people turn away. McBride looks at it with wit and love and makes you laugh. It's like the story of John Brown as told by Richard Pryor and Redd Foxx. And when you start laughing, you see humanness in everyone—the enslaved, Frederick Douglass, J. E. B. Stuart, Brown. McBride asked that we cast people we liked in real life as the racists in the show because, he said, if the racists have horns, then the Black suffering isn't real. Some think John Brown was insane, but he believed that a society that supported the enslavement of humans was insane, that the disease was violence, and the cure





Hawke, who turns fifty in November, has often collaborated with the Austin-based filmmaker Richard Linklater.

was going to be violence, and that he'd be that violence.

How did you prepare for the role?

I visited Brown's grave site, I read everything I could—biographies and his letters. But I had to remind myself that I wasn't playing John Brown, I was playing McBride's John Brown, which is Brown as viewed by a fourteen-year-old boy. In the book, McBride manages to walk a razor's edge and honor the reality while making you laugh. He makes fun of everybody. No one is spared. It's Twain-esque. He pulls it off through the voice of Onion, who just wants to live, and will be a slave or a freedom fighter, or wear a dress to do so, and who, in the end, figures out who he really is, finding something worth fighting and dying for.

Along with your eighty-three movie and television acting credits, you're a stage director and actor, a screenwriter and

movie director, a documentarian and producer. You're also a musician, and you have published three novels and one graphic novel. What drives you?

I'm not sure I know. I realized during quarantine that there are some positive manifestations of being a restless soul and there are some negative ones. I've had time to ask myself, *What are you running away from?* But I've always been doing two things at once since I started acting at age fourteen, like writing a book while filming a movie, or preparing to play Macbeth while acting in an action movie. One domino would always hit another. It makes me happy, I guess.

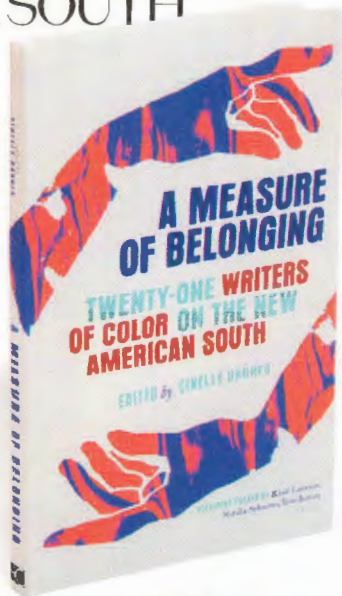
What does being an artist mean to you?

It's like a family Thanksgiving. Some people cook, some make the fire, and somebody has to sit at the table and say, "Hey, guys, what are you thinking about, what do you want to talk about?" Someone has to push the conversation. An artist's job is to make time fun and valuable on a deeper level, to

be entertaining and thought-provoking. I see it as part of our collective mental health. A society that's rich with ideas and able to handle complicated conversations and open dialogue is a healthy one.

You were born in Texas but moved away as a child. Is the South still a part of you?

It never leaves you. I moved around a lot, living with my mom all over the place. But my dad was always in Texas. I went there in the summers, which were filled with heat and love and joy. When I sit down to write, it always ends up being about Texas. It's where my imagination lives. My first two novels were about Texas, to some degree. *Blaze* [Hawke's film about the Austin musician Blaze Foley] was about Texas. I've done films in South Carolina and Louisiana and Virginia. My friendship with [the director and Texan] Richard Linklater is rooted in a love of the South. And, to put it simply, I don't think you ever get those black-eyed peas and cornbread out of your system. **G**



BOOKS

Lift Every Voice

A NEW ANTHOLOGY
HIGHLIGHTS THE STORIES OF SOUTHERN
WRITERS OF COLOR

By Jonathan Miles

Not even a geographical place” is how William Faulkner’s Chick Mallison, in *Intruder in the Dust*, regarded the North, “but an emotional idea.” Mallison may just have well—and more accurately—been describing his native South. Yet even more nebulous, and more emotionally charged, is the notion of Southern identity—especially for people of color. For *A Measure of Belonging*, a thoroughly timely anthology, the writer and editor Cinelle Barnes marshals twenty-one considerations of what it means to be a Southerner of color. The assembled essayists, most of them young, are African American, Native American, Puerto Rican, Filipina, Peruvian, Indian, and Korean, but all of them—whether by birth, choice, or the whims of fate—call the South home and, more important, define themselves, in varying and sometimes painful ways, as Southerners. These writers realize, uneasily at times, that they belong to the South, from the way they talk to the way they eat to the way they must reckon with what Tom Robbins called the region’s “volatile and sometimes violent idiosyncrasies.” What they aim to make clear is that the South, in turn, belongs to them.

When Barnes, born in the Philippines and raised in New York, arrived in South Carolina a decade ago, some of the hospitality she encountered fell short of what the brochures promised. She did not shrink. “I decided that every one of my projects thereafter would be an invitation for other people of color,” she writes in her introduction, “to come, to be visible, and to thrive here.”

■ *A Measure of Belonging*, \$17, Hub City Press

The writers she gathered know “how to take up space and make space,” she writes, “in the way that only millennials and Gen Xers know and zealously practice.”

Aruni Kashyap, a novelist and teacher born in India, takes us apartment hunting in Athens, Georgia, to show us the belittling questions and half-hidden suspicions with which he must contend. The poet Joy Priest provides liner notes to the hip-hop soundtrack of her Louisville adolescence, gorgeously annotating the “songs of representation” that “portended a come up for those of us living in American obscurity.” Toni Jensen, who is Métis and teaches in Arkansas, confronts her own ability to “pass” as white after one of her African American grad students is bullied. Other essays probe the liminal areas between the poles of black and white. The author Ivelisse Rodriguez, “a dark-skinned Puerto Rican,” describes being flummoxed at a North Carolina DMV office when asked to select her race. Her choice is Black; the clerk disagrees. M. Evelina Galang recounts the quandary faced by her father, a Filipino immigrant, when practicing medicine in the still-segregated South. The hospital guard directed him to the “Whites Only” entrance. “But look,” her father replied, pointing to his skin. “I am not white.”

Several essays evoke Richard Wright’s agonized line from *Black Boy*: “I was not leaving the south to forget the south, but so that some day I might understand it.” The most bracing of these is “Treacherous Joy: An Epistle to the South,” from the African American poet Tiana Clark, who shares her longing to return to the Tennessee of her youth. “I thought home wasn’t supposed to hurt,” she writes, “but everywhere hurts to live, so I want to come back home to the hurt I know best.”

That same hurt gets examined, gut-wrenchingly, by the Mississippi novelist and memoirist Kiese Laymon. His essay, “That’s Not Actually True,” resists description and defies paraphrasing. It is a reviewer’s cliché, when assessing anthologies, to deem a single piece “worth the price of admission alone.” But the cliché is true here. Laymon’s sentences land like sledgehammers. He forces you to rethink almost everything, including, if you’re a white Southerner, a lifetime of interactions.

Barnes’s subtitle is *Twenty-One Writers of Color on the New American South*. There’s fair cause to be skeptical of every New South iteration that comes along. (Walker Percy may have said it best: “My definition of a New South would be a South in which it never occurred to anybody to mention the New South.”) Yet the South on exhibit here *does* feel new: polyglot, multiracial, small-c catholic, urbanized, unwilling to accommodate or overlook the past but instead primed to confront it head-on, and keen to sift the South’s virtues—lovingly—from its flaws. Barnes’s goal stands as a one-line manifesto that, as this anthology makes clear, deserves our broadest adoption: “I’ve committed myself to making this place as big as it actually is.”

Seasonal Eating

Three Can’t-Miss
Fall Cookbooks

It’s not always on the menu at her Chauhan Ale & Masala House in Nashville, but Maneet Chauhan serves a tamarind gin and tonic when a guest asks for a tippale inspired by India. The chef and *Chopped* judge shares that recipe and more vibrant odes to her native country in *Chaat* (Clarkson Potter). For *I Cook in Color* (Running Press), the Atlanta chef Asha Gomez celebrates Southern ingredients and worldwide flavors: a Vidalia onion soup oapped with Gruyère; a crawfish boil perfumed with cumin and saffron. The North Carolina chef and TV personality Vivian Howard provides pep talks aplenty in *This Will Make It Taste Good* (Voracious), as well as the Little Green Dress sauce she plops on everything from deviled eggs to pizza, and other can-do recipes such as Worth-the-Hype Pimento Cheese. —CJ Lotz

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Williams at the Aiken-Rhett House Museum in Charleston; Untitled, acrylic on paper, in the double parlor; Pickets, exhibited in the onetime quarters of enslaved people.



ARTS

Organic Talent

FLETCHER WILLIAMS III DRAWS, PAINTS, AND SCULPTS ART FROM THE LOWCOUNTRY'S ABUNDANCE

By CJ Lotz

In Fletcher Williams III's hands, Spanish moss, pulled down from a live oak, transforms into a brush saturated with paint. Discarded picket fences twist and turn in a sculpture that reaches to the sky. Stems link into a blanket beneath palmetto fronds curled into roses. Williams collects these familiar textures of his South Carolina Lowcountry home, then reimagines them and reshapes their forms. "I'm not sure if the material comes first or the idea," Williams says. "But I let the materials lead most of the time."

This past summer, Williams impressed Charlestonians and visitors with his sprawling *Promiseland* exhibition of installations, sculpture, and works on paper placed amid the peeling wallpaper and gilded mirrors of the Aiken-Rhett House Museum and in its high-walled work yard, once an urban plantation the governor of South Carolina owned in the mid-1800s. Williams used fences as the subjects of large-scale paintings, created with handfuls of that Spanish moss as his paintbrush, and he stood fence pickets along the same route that an enslaved cook would have walked up a back staircase. "A white picket fence has always represented the idea of aspiration, of a dream," Williams says. But it also represents questions. "What's beyond the fence? Are we scared to get a little too close?"

The lauded Lowcountry artist Jonathan Green, who for nearly forty years has painted and exhibited vibrant scenes of Gullah culture, walked through Williams's exhibition in reverence. "I was moved at how a young artist, a man of the space and presence and also the face of history in Charleston, could create works that were like characters in this old house," Green says. "His work showed what artists can do to give a face and life to so many important cultural institutions in this city."

Although he's just thirty-three, Williams has already experienced the epiphany some artists find late in their careers—that leaving home and then returning can rumble ideas to life. At the Cooper Union art school in New York, Williams built on his technical skills but was particularly affected by the ideas of the

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TALK OF THE SOUTH



author Toni Morrison, who wrote, “All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.”

Growing up in North Charleston, Williams rode his bike along trails, searched for turtles, and earned a few bucks by meticulously cutting his neighbors’ lawns. As a middle schooler, he surprised his mom by building an entire shed. “It just felt right to put things together,” he says. “It all seemed intuitive. Well-made things fit the way they should.” His teachers at Trident Technical College encouraged him to pursue art further in New York. He found creative ways to support himself: After returning to Charleston in 2013, he took a job driving a hotel shuttle. He talked with downtown tourists and urged them to chat with and buy from the children who sell palmetto leaves twisted into roses. When he left that job and devoted himself full-time to making art, Williams explored how the handmade roses connected the kids, and him, to a long, long line of African American

From left: Homestead (center) and Work Garden; Untitled, in a bedroom; Gift to a Gardener, with palmetto roses.



ingenuity and craftsmanship, and for his *Promiseland* exhibition, he wove together three thousand palmetto roses as an ode to that legacy.

Williams’s advisory council spans beyond artists and into the world of practical problem-solving in which he grew up. He counts among his top gurus North Charleston hardware shop owners, palm leaf foragers, and auto body specialists, who spitball ideas with him: how to work with old tools, how to bend rebar, and how to pick just the right paint to spray onto rusted metal and wood. In turn, a new-to-fine-art crowd shows up to support him—many visitors who toured *Promiseland* told Williams they had never been to an art exhibit before, or until then had never set foot inside the historic Charleston mansion. “Young artists like Fletcher are creating a new Charleston Renaissance,” Green says. “He farms the area, yes, but he’s also a hunter and a gatherer who can draw, paint, and sculpt. Fletcher can conduct all the instruments.”

Up next, Williams hopes to find a studio in which to build his large-scale artwork, to install more public art, and to continue to connect artists, audiences, and craftspeople in unexpected ways. “There’s a lot to discover in Charleston,” he says. “I don’t think it would be a curse if I interacted with this landscape and made work here forever.”

Williams explored how the handmade palmetto roses connected the kids, and him, to a long, long line of African American ingenuity and craftsmanship

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ASK G&G

Beasts of Burden

COOP CAVEATS, HOLIDAY ETIQUETTE, AND A JAZZ GENIUS

By Guy Martin

Q
A

Wondering: Home more and acreage aplenty, so wouldn't it be fun to bring in some pigs and chickens? While we admire the impulse to set up the Southern homestead circa 1925, with the chickens out back and the hogs quartered in Great-granddaddy's barn, could you please prune your vision of agrarian bliss to one species? Farming's most deceptive axiom is that any animal you allegedly "own" requires you to work for it, not the other way around. As future employers go, chickens are nominally the beginner's easier choice. Your goal is to create a setup that will give you a break from your 24/7 imitation of Sisyphus, say in February, when a freak gale drops the temp to ten below and you have to wonder whether the ventilation you cut in the coop last summer will cause the combs and wattles on your Barred Rocks and Buff Orpingtons to freeze, or whether you need to gather some one-bys, your hammer, saw, sawhorse, insulation, and a pocketful of sixpenny nails before heading out at 3:00 a.m. to warm those birds up. But before we get into what kind of long underwear you prefer, let me back up: Do you have enough permethrin on hand for that roost-mite infestation, or are you betting diatomaceous earth and

wood ash will do the trick? Is the flock pecking that one hen to death because the timer broke on your coop light and you took a week to notice, or is she looking ragged because she's molting? Get the picture? It's why they call it animal *husbandry*—you're married to each and every one of 'em, and you're in it for better and for worse.

Is issuing zero invitations for the holidays, not even to Aunt Mabel, whom we always have up from the coast, the best tactic this year?

The year carries many long tons of mortal freight, hurting us in every endeavor, those crucial to the fight against SARS-CoV-2, such as PPE for frontline health-care workers, and in the tangential features of social life, such as concerts and dinners. As huge swaths of the South led the nation in infection rates this past summer, it seemed clear that the spike would rough up T'giving/Xmas 2020. Southerners are more instinctive hosts than guests, so that, as Dr. Fauci admirably keeps hammering home, it's a long war in which we're obliged to err on the side of prudence, dialing back the most gregarious telephone-book weddings and just-us family dos alike. Your example extends to every family. Show the Aunt Mabels of the South that you care in every other possible way, sending along some good books and fine chocolates. And bombard them with a more sustaining level of care, an element of contact that often falls by the wayside at a boisterous holiday table, namely, with a few plainspoken words from the heart.

I love Louis Armstrong. But, artistically speaking, there's the creator phase, then the pop phase, right?

Armstrong's brilliant profile in American music might seem divided: The blistering burst of songwriting and musical creativity of the 1925 to 1928 Chicago sessions with his Hot Five and Hot Seven doesn't quite square with the full-blown "entertainer" racking up performances of "Mack the Knife" and "What a Wonderful World" on stages from Paris to Vegas to Accra. Don't belittle the later Armstrong; he could make it all swing. His "Hello, Dolly!" shoved the Beatles from the top of the chart in 1964. Then sixty-two, he remains the oldest musician to have a number one. Armstrong was protean, and never stopped being that, in his deft musical assembly of the grand African American narrative traditions of his native New Orleans, his diamond-hard transposition of those skills into the soaring jazz solo as we know it, and his unapologetic vocal innovations, not the least of them his popularization of scat. Any single such accomplishment would make him a founding father of the American songbook; Armstrong did all three to the end of his life. His embouchure was so ferocious and his ability to hit a high C so athletic that his lip would bleed down his shirt. He pared the calluses with a razor, as a boxer's cutman would cut a swollen eyelid. Louis Armstrong was beyond tough, and he had the innate grace to make it all seem easy. **G**



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MUSIC

Georgia on His Mind

GRAMMY-NOMINATED
SONGWRITER BRENT COBB FOLLOWS
HIS OWN COUNTRY BEAT

By Matt Hendrickson



In 2017, Brent Cobb was in Arizona touring with fellow country troubadour Jamey Johnson. After his opening set, the relatively unknown Cobb was hanging outside in the dirt parking lot with his wife, Layne. Underneath desert stars lit up like a chandelier, the two ran into a priest who crafted rosaries, telling them he “doesn’t know who they’re for until God lets me know.” He gave one to Cobb, who then hung it from his truck’s rear-view mirror.

Three years later, this past July, Cobb was in the same truck with his toddler son, Tuck, when they were T-boned on the driver’s side by a car that blew through an intersection near their home in South Georgia. Cobb broke his collarbone and tore a ligament in his back, but Tuck emerged unscathed. When Cobb went to fetch items from the truck, the rosary had broken, and the cross had landed just below Tuck’s car seat. “I mean, I don’t want to get too out there on you,” Cobb says in his molasses-thick drawl. “But the accident could have been a lot worse. I need to find Father Matthew and have him make me a new one.”

Cobb puts plenty of stock in the mystical and in the symbolism of life-changing events. This from a man who freely admits to eating a good amount of psychedelic mushrooms in the run-up to the release of his mesmerizing new album, *Keep ‘Em on They Toes*. “I have had a couple of life-altering experiences after eating mushrooms,” he says. “That being said, I’ve had the same feelings praying to God when sober.”

A South Georgia native, Cobb recently moved back to the area with his family after spending years in Los Angeles and Nashville, where he cowrote hits for the likes of Luke Bryan and Miranda Lambert. He released

his major-label debut, *Shine On Rainy Day*, in 2016, showcasing a knack for melody and vivid lyricism that earned him a Grammy nomination and took him to the upper echelons of Nashville songwriters. That album and Cobb’s fantastic 2018 swamp funk follow-up, *Providence Canyon*—both produced by top Nashville producer Dave Cobb, his cousin—are filled with evocative snapshots of things he missed from country life: hunting, fishing, and meeting the old-timers at the gas station for a cup of coffee.

The new material gently but firmly stakes out more personal and topical terrain. But it’s never brash or confrontational. If anything, it sometimes lets the listener off easy. “Soap Box,” a shuffling piano duet with the Nashville singer Nikki Lane, asks people to “get along,” while the sparse, mournful “When You Go” digs deeper, with Cobb lamenting family members who pass the mashed potatoes around the table but take their differences to the grave.

The delicate title track is a message to his newborn son about walking to his own beat. And in the ironically titled, harmonica-fueled romp “Shut Up and Sing,” Cobb defiantly lays out his job as a songwriter. “Every album I do I have the mindset that if I died the day after it came out and it was the only thing my kids would ever have, who would I be to them?” he says. “The last two albums said, ‘This is where I came from’ and ‘This is what I care about.’ The new one is how Daddy feels about things.”

Cobb cowrote those two songs with his wife, who, before their son was born, worked as a pharmacist. Occasionally, when the couple can pawn off Tuck and his six-year-old sister, Lyla, onto their grandparents, they’ll relax on the porch trading lyrics. Family is paramount to Cobb, something that resonates even more deeply after the truck accident. He’s taken to waking up early with the kids, grabbing coffee, and walking down to a nearby lake, where his daughter has become obsessed with fishing. “She’s got the fever,” he says proudly. Afterward, they sometimes take long strolls in the woods. “I never wanted to leave Georgia in the first place, and I was gone for twelve years. All the things I had been missing I can now experience every day.”

Cobb during a break while recording his new album, *Keep ‘Em on They Toes*.

Desert Blues

A genre-bending stunner from a West African powerhouse



Songhoy Blues OPTIMISME

What would you get if Jack White and Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti showed up at Junior Kimbrough’s juke joint to jam? Something like Songhoy Blues, an electrifying rock quartet from Mali. The

group’s third album, *Optimisme*—released by the Oxford, Mississippi, label Fat Possum Records—pulses with frenetic desert blues, spellbinding guitar heroics, and urgent rhythms. The songs,

including the band’s first in English, “Worry,” are a call to continue to fight for equality for all races and creeds. It’s some of the best-sounding protest rock you’ll hear in 2020. —M.H.



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■ Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana

Photograph by Nell Campbell
Moss Bluff Bay I, 2001

"I look at duck blinds as vernacular architecture in Louisiana," says Nell Campbell. The Mississippi-born, California-based photographer has captured some fifty-six blinds along the Calcasieu River over two decades as part of her Duck Blinds: Louisiana series. Though not a hunter herself, Campbell grew up in nearby Lake Charles, water-skiing on the Calcasieu, and she revisits the blinds on her trips back home. She shoots on old-school film using a Mamiya 7 camera, explaining that when she does, "I'm more thoughtful," as each roll yields only ten pictures. She took this image from the bow of a childhood friend's bass boat on a late December afternoon. "With the moss hanging from the cypress knees and the palmetto leaves," Campbell says, "this shot just feels quintessential Louisiana." 

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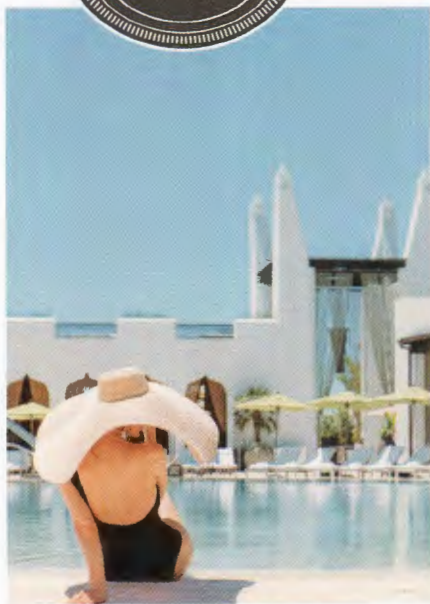
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Crisp white bulbdoms make up the Alys Beach skyline.





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On the edge of the Florida Panhandle lies a pristine, Gulf-skirting community where beauty and simplicity are uniquely alive. In Alys Beach, striking architecture and unfailing attention to detail give way to an otherworldly escape where gleaming structures and a calm cerulean shore preside over all. The 30A beach town transcends its surroundings, seeming worlds away from the large Southeastern cities in driving distance, and even the smallest taste of life here can be intoxicating, inspiring travelers to make a home of their own in this New Urbanist paradise.

Alys Beach is defined by balance—between natural beauty and innovative design, luxury living and simple pursuits. From the lively town center to the serene coast, pedestrian paths crisscross the area, creating a sense of community as friends and neighbors are drawn outdoors. It's no coincidence, then, that the locale is centered on alfresco experiences, from breezy dining locales to glimmering pools and vast green spaces. Though

not a resort, Alys Beach can feel nearly as lavish, a place where locals and guests have access to fine communal amenities. Both physical and spiritual wellness lie at the heart of the community, and residents can care for both at the state-of-the-art ZUMA Wellness Center. For a beachfront getaway in their own backyard, homeowners need only check out the multistory Beach Club, an exclusive waterfront gathering place where kicking back is all too easy.

Of course, the beach itself is the community's crown jewel. Reminiscent of the Caribbean, the Gulf coast is known for endless stretches of soft white sand meeting crystal-clear water that's never too cold. And there's no need to worry about claiming a peaceful spot on the sand; access to the Alys Beach shoreline is exclusive to homeowners and guests, meaning quiet, uncrowded days await all year. Despite its calmer nature, the beach is not without excitement—with catamarans and paddleboards available

“A place where urbanism, architecture, landscape, art, and green infrastructure all converge in a rarefied atmosphere of controlled exuberance.”

—Galina Tachieva
architect and town
planner at DPZ CoDe-
sign, original planners
of Alys Beach

Above: From the pool to the beach to your own private terrace, the community is dotted with spaces to relax and unwind.

to rent, offshore adventures are found in spades, while a food and drink service will deliver directly to the lounge chair of those preferring dry land.

Throughout the community, ownership opportunities are abundant, be it custom or semicustom builds, existing homes, townhouses, or condominiums. Thanks to a resident construction team and a group of approved builders, a consistent thread of quality and design runs through Alys Beach, creating a harmonious collection of homes and shared spaces. Always a seamless process, becoming a resident can take many forms. In the Somerset program, for example, buyers can work with Alys Beach's expert sales, construction, and design teams on breathtaking semicustom homes, while move-in ready residences and luxury condominiums such as The Selene & Easterly, currently in development, are perfect for those eager to drop their bags and hit the beach. Wherever new owners land, neighborhoods are designed with connectivity in mind, the community's entirely walkable layout allowing for friendship between neighbors and easy access to the shore.

Another key aspect of Alys Beach? The carefully curated shops and wide array of restaurants dotting the town center. While each business delivers something unique, a collective delight in quality design and a passion for full, rich living connect the robust community of merchants. From the fresh-cut flowers stocked at the beloved home decor shop Mast to the beach essentials and resort-chic attire at the Alys Shoppe, the town's retail destinations have everything residents need to settle into life in Alys Beach. And when it comes to dining, fresh, clean cuisine and locally driven ingredients are plentiful, whether you're snacking on fish tacos via Beach Club service or indulging in delectable coastal fare at the slightly more polished George's at Alys Beach.

Put simply, Alys Beach is built around effortless pleasures—an airy deck overlooking the water, a walk on the beach against a pastel sunset, a cool cocktail enjoyed in good company. Here you'll find an oasis like no other, a place where life is lived slowly, joyfully, and full of intention.

Learn more at AlysBeach.com, or contact the sales team at 850.213.5518 or sales@alysbeach.com to schedule a tour.



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Alys Beach's newest Gulf-front condominiums feature easy access to the Beach Club and enchanting shoreline views.

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14 SEA VENTURE ALLEY

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23 SEA VENTURE ALLEY

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74 BUTTERWOOD ALLEY

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\$5,195,000



366 NORTH SOMERSET STREET

Bordering a nature preserve, this property features a two-story stone fireplace, a wine cellar, and multiple courtyards.

\$6,395,000



18 SILVER SEA COURT

Part of the Somerset program, this four-bedroom home is customizable to the buyer's needs.

\$3,096,770



The Wild Wonder of Kiawah River

*FOR RESIDENTS OF THIS BURGEONING COMMUNITY,
A WIDE COASTAL OASIS IS AS CLOSE AS THE BACKYARD*

Just a stone's throw from Charleston, South Carolina, lies Kiawah River, an enchanting waterfront community where the Lowcountry's simple pleasures meet resort-style amenities. Amid two thousand acres of peaceful Johns Island marshland, the residential oasis skirts twenty miles of shoreline, every inch teeming with verdant flora and undisturbed wildlife. Thoughtfully planned by some of the region's sharpest architects and conservationists, the budding development is an all-encompassing retreat, harmoniously balancing the natural beauty of the maritime forest with spaces for dining, gathering, and best of all, adventure.

As its structures come to life, new residents are invited to make Kiawah River their own, choosing from custom and semicustom home designs in classic island style, all crafted with outdoor living in mind. Assembled from a select group of the Southeast's top designers, Kiawah River's architecture and planning teams have forged a breathtaking array of designs, resulting in what architect Julia Starr Sanford, the visionary behind Alys Beach, Florida, describes as "elegant rusticity meets unpretentious luxury." Beyond the homes' breezy porches and patios, some of the region's best beaches are practically backyard territory, from Beachwalker Park on Kiawah Island to the beaches of Charleston at Sullivan's Island, Isle of Palms, and beyond.

Kiawah River's lush, diverse ecosystem includes marsh flats, maritime forests, and a quiet shoreline, all connected by twenty miles of carefully laid trails. Acting as community links, the meandering paths wind through oak canopies and groves of trees, opening up to a number of neighborhood parks. While exploring the property's preserved spaces, expect to spot a winged creature or two. Here, opportunities for birding are plentiful as herons soar overhead, wading birds hunt for fish on spindly legs, and songbirds make a stop on their winter migration. Currently, two bald eagle habitats thrive on Kiawah River's grounds, while other coastal species such as anhingas, egrets, and roseate spoonbills also make their homes nearby.

For fishermen, access to these bountiful waters is made easier than ever. Coastal South Carolina is a haven for redfish, which flood the shallow marsh flats with each rise and fall of the tide. Meanwhile, spotted sea trout are known to gather near the rich pluff mud banks, often thick with unharvested oyster beds. At the soon-to-come Mullet Hall Base Camp, Kiawah River's expert staff will offer state-of-the-art gear and casting lessons, preparing families for a day of angling at one of the community's best fishing spots, the Great Salt Pond. There's only one true way to experience the wonder of Kiawah River—see it for yourself.

*To book a tour of the sea island escape and learn more,
visit KiawahRiver.com.*



THE ASHLEY

A wide front porch welcomes residents to this 2,800-square-foot open floor plan, designed with entertaining in mind. The Ashley, part of Kiawah River's Artisan series, features a spacious kitchen with a vaulted shiplap ceiling, adjacent to an inviting screened porch with a fireplace for comfortable outdoor living all year long. \$1,100,000



2138 BOATWRIGHT ROAD

This custom waterfront homesite overlooks the Great Oak Basin, offering expansive waterfront views from multiple vantage points and a perfect perch to view the sunset. Centrally located, this 0.22-acre property is just a short walk to amenities such as the community dock, Oak Park, maritime trails, and the future Spring House restaurant. \$460,000



4006 CARIB ALLEY

With the most linear waterfront footage available at Kiawah River, this address offers sweeping views of the Great Oak Basin under a canopy of beautiful live oaks. In the heart of Kiawah River, the 0.54-acre property allows for a large-scale custom home or a professionally designed turnkey option from the community's Architect series. \$660,000



THE DOYEN

The Doyen is designed with an emphasis on gathering—both indoors and out. Bathed in light and filled with natural tones, the open-floor-plan home is bookended by spacious dual porches. The space also features white oak flooring, gleaming top-of-the-line appliances, and cozy nooks to complement the airy feel. \$854,000

Contact: 843.371.1145, live@kiawahriver.com

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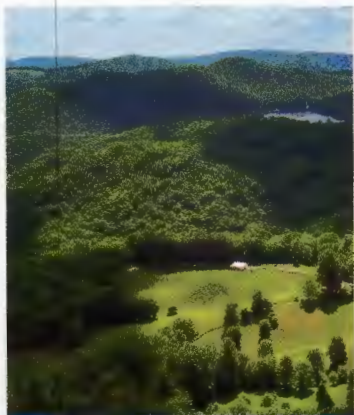
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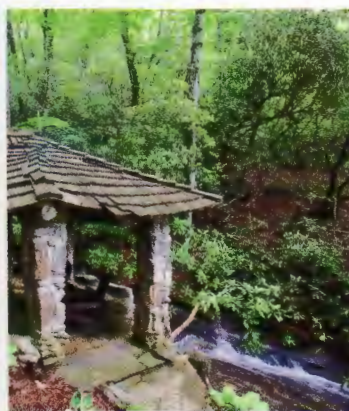


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PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON STEMPLE

A CELEBRATION OF SOUTHERN FOOD AND DRINK

JUBILEE

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Pit Boss

*DERRICK WALKER, THE OWNER
AND PITMASTER OF FORT
WORTH'S SMOKE-A-HOLICS BBQ,
ON LEARNING THE CRAFT, SMOKED
BOLOGNA, AND "TEX-SOUL"*

By Adrian Miller

Walker, a Fort Worth native, in the pit room at Smoke-A-Holics.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FREDRIK BRODEN

GARDEN&GUN OCT. / NOV. 2020 55



From top: A tray of ribs and rib tips, brisket, smoked bologna, sausages, and smoked turkey; Walker with his wife, Kesha.

His barbecue mentor: "When I was twelve years old, my grandfather pulled up to the house with his truck, and he had a smoker behind it. I had never seen anything like it before in my life. He taught me how to start a fire, maintain a fire, and trim and season meat, and he gave me a crash course." On "Tex-Soul": "In my area, there's been an influx of Hispanic pitmasters, and they've been combining Tex-Mex and barbecue. So I thought of a phrase that would let everybody know that I'm serving barbecue with [soul food] things like collard greens, cornbread, candied yams, and smoked mac and cheese." Introducing...rib tips! "Rib tips are big in African American culture in the Midwest. After I introduced them, my customers kept asking, 'What are rib tips? What are rib tips?' Everybody is paying attention to those now. When I started out making ribs, I did a St. Louis cut, so that strip of rib tips was left, and we threw them on the grill. We call them 'cook snacks.'" The sellouts: "Ribs, brisket, turkey, sausage—they're all running a footrace every day to see which goes first." About "bolo": "That's what we call our smoked bologna. We put these cool score marks on it, and then once it cooks, it kind of blows up. We cut it real thick, about two inches, and it goes on white bread with sauce on the side. It was always a staple in Fort Worth when I was growing up." Gaining barbecue knowledge: "Man,

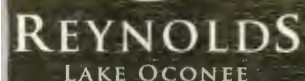
AGE: 43

HOME BASE: Fort Worth, Texas

KNOWN FOR: His restaurant, Smoke-A-Holics BBQ, which he took from a pop-up that began in 2003 to a food truck and now a brick-and-mortar location. Walker calls his style Tex-Soul, and with help from his wife, Kesha, the Fort Worth native has made Smoke-A-Holics an essential gathering place for some of the best barbecue in the city.

I've been a student of barbecue since I was thirteen or fourteen years old. When I got into my early twenties, I kinda got sucked into the whole barbecue thing, and I just studied barbecue from North Carolina to South Carolina to Memphis to Texas to... wherever barbecue was being done. I'm just a student of the game." His wife was a little dubious...at first: "The first smoker I bought, she said, 'Hey, we don't really have the money for spending on stuff like that.' When I got it and she saw the response, she said, 'Wait a minute, the one you've got isn't big enough.'" Now she's his secret weapon: "Kesha does a little of everything: baking desserts—including the sweet potato pie, the Coca-Cola cake, and the banana pudding—cleaning, serving, acting as cashier, bagging, whatever needs to be done. On top of that, she's a hairstylist and splits

her days between the restaurant and her salon. She's a real-life Superwoman." How the hospital saved his business life: "After working at Williams Chicken and Taco Bell, I went to work at Baylor All Saints hospital in Fort Worth. That landed me a career in hospital kitchens. I managed kitchens to the point where it was just me. I had to cook, serve the cafeteria, go upstairs and feed the patients, then come back down and clean the kitchen. I had to order the groceries, and when the groceries showed up, I would have to put up the groceries. I was in charge of the budgeting. So all of that stuff led me to where I am now. Once I got my own place, the business part was easy." On "loaded" cornbread: "We have a honey butter cornbread that's got our baked beans on top, then it's got chopped brisket, shredded cheese, green onions, barbecue sauce, and sour cream. We can't cook enough of it." **G**



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ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC

Super Beans

A KICKED-UP TAKE ON A
ONE-POT MAINSTAY

By Kim Severson



MEET THE CHEF: RYAN HACKER

Hometown:
Tyler, Texas

Pandemic hobby:
“I started smoking
meats again.” (He’s
particularly proud of
his pastrami.)

*Item he’d grab
if the kitchen was
burning down:*
A ten-inch
cast-iron skillet that
belonged to his
great-grandmother.

*Advice to
aspiring chefs:*
“Find a mentor,
and get a business
degree if you really
want to understand
what you are doing
in the restaurant.”

Pandemic cooking has made stars out of forgotten kitchen staples, especially the humble bean.

Ryan Hacker was only a few months into his new job as executive chef at the beloved French Quarter fixture Brennan’s Restaurant when New Orleans closed its dining rooms. “I never had this much time at home before,” he says. While he helped plan for reopening, he spent time teaching his two young daughters to cook family recipes. One of them was soup beans, a simple one-pot meal that over the years he has transformed into something he has nicknamed Southern cassoulet, after the French meat-and-bean stew.

Often associated with Appalachia, soup beans—traditionally long-simmered pinto beans sometimes bulked up with a little meat—have been an economical go-to of many Southern kitchens. Hacker ate his first bowl while growing up just outside Tyler, Texas. Pinto beans would go into the slow cooker with some sausage and onions. One batch could feed the whole family for a couple of days. When he got to college, soup beans provided an inexpensive way to stay fed on a student’s budget. Even after landing an internship at Hamersley’s Bistro in Boston, he relied on them. “I was making cassoulet every day at the restaurant, but I barely had enough money to make it to work and back,” he says. The French stew inspired him to add a little inexpensive white wine to his own beans and to top them with crunchy bread crumbs.

His recipe evolved again after he married his wife, Malorie, who had Southwest Texas roots. She grew up eating frijoles charros, which had more pork and were brightened with tomatoes and jalapeños. After the young family landed in New Orleans, he took to adding a dice of bell pepper and celery with the onion (the holy trinity) and andouille sausage. “Now you look at it, and it’s nowhere near a traditional soup bean recipe,” he says. “But it’s the story of me.”

While the beans cook, it’s essential to keep adding enough water so they stay soupy. Hacker likes to serve them over a hunk of cornbread to soak up the liquid and finishes the dish with a buttery, crunchy layer of seasoned cornbread crumbs. By the second day, he says, the beans will have turned creamy and the meat even more luscious. “Once the meat is gone, we like to turn whatever’s left into refried beans. That’s what’s so great about beans. They just keep on giving.” **E**



Texas-Style Soup Beans

Yield: 6–8 servings

For the Soup Beans:

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp. bacon fat
2 smoked ham hocks
or 2 lb. pork shoulder
cut into large cubes
½ lb. sliced bacon,
cut into ½-inch pieces
1 large white onion, diced
1 rib celery, diced
1 green bell pepper,
seeded and diced
1 jalapeño pepper,
seeded and diced
6 cloves garlic, sliced
1 lb. dried pinto beans
(Hacker prefers
Camellia brand)
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme,
or ½ tsp. dried thyme
½ cup white wine
1 cup canned
crushed tomatoes
About 5 cups water,
plus more if needed
4 links andouille or other
smoky, spicy sausage,
cut into 2-inch sections
Salt and pepper
Cornbread crumble
(recipe follows)
Thinly sliced white onion
and sliced jalapeños,
for serving

PREPARATION

In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat bacon fat over medium heat. If using pork shoulder, brown it lightly on all sides and then remove and set aside.

Add bacon, onion, celery, bell pepper, diced jalapeño,

and garlic to the bacon fat and cook until the onions are soft and translucent and the bacon has rendered some of its fat but has not started to brown.

Add beans, ham hocks (or pork shoulder), bay leaves, thyme, wine, tomato, and 5 cups of water. Increase heat to high and bring the liquid to a boil. Lower to a simmer and let beans cook for about 2 hours. Stir periodically to prevent sticking on the bottom of the pot, and add a bit more water if the soup beans seem too thick. Check beans for doneness about an hour into cooking. If you can bite through one easily but the bean still has bite, you’re almost done. If not, keep cooking.

Once the beans are almost done, remove ham hocks, pull the meat from the bones, and return it to the pot (skip this step if using pork shoulder). Add sausage and cook 15 minutes more, or until sausage is hot in the center. Season with salt and pepper.

To serve, place a slice of cornbread in each bowl and ladle beans on top, including a bit of sausage and pork in each bowl. Sprinkle some cornbread crumble over top, and finish with sliced onion and jalapeños.

For the Cornbread Crumble:

INGREDIENTS

1 cup cornbread, crumbled
3 tbsp. butter, softened
½ tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. black pepper
1 tbsp. parsley, finely
chopped

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350°F. Thoroughly combine all ingredients except parsley. Spread out on a baking tray and bake until golden brown, about 12–14 minutes. Let cool and then mix with the parsley.



DRINKS

Clear Winners

SMALL-BATCH SOUTHERN
VODKAS STEP UP TO THE PALATE

By Wayne Curtis

Vodka has long been your friend who can do just about everything, yet refrains from being the center of attention. It can sharpen any beverage—*Orange juice! Tomato juice! Red Bull!*—but lingers in the background, smirking rather than shouting. That's partly by design. For years, the federal agency that oversees alcohol has defined vodka as a spirit "without distinctive character, aroma, taste, or color." It's been the wallflower liquor.



That changed this past spring. After long consideration, the feds quietly dropped that definition. Vodka is defined now by how it's produced rather than how it looks or tastes.

This recalibration wasn't aimed at opening the floodgates for more inventive vodkas. Instead, the government was essentially catching up with what's been happening for a decade or more among craft distillers. Vodka can be made from anything fermentable—potatoes, molasses, or corn, for instance, each of which has its own taste profile. Larger producers usually distill using industrial-sized equipment that efficiently strips out flavors, leaving a clean, neutral spirit. But flavors can persist, if faintly, when made with the smaller-scale equipment craft distillers typically employ. Thanks to the change in regulations, taste is now a feature rather than a flaw.

Across the South a number of distillers have been creating notable vodkas. Old Fourth Distillery in Atlanta puts out a sugarcane-based version that retains a touch of sweetness. J. T. Meleck vodka, from Louisiana, has a dryness that suggests the rice from which it came. And Founding Spirits vodka, made in Washington, D.C., seems a bit more structured and muscular, crafted as it is from hard red spring wheat from North Dakota that the company calls "the aristocrat of wheat."

Under current law, distillers must continue to produce vodka at a higher proof than whiskey or rum, so it will always have a cleaner taste than its spirituous cousins. That means it will still all but disappear when it mingles with mixers—though it can hold its own in a dry vodka martini.

Traditionally, the craft of vodka has been not so much in the production as in the selling of it—the shape of the bottle, the brilliance of advertising, the forging of an aspirational brand. (Absolut *insert city name here*, anyone?) Among the slickest early marketing campaigns was one launched by Smirnoff in the 1940s—it touted a drink the company had helped concoct called the Moscow Mule, served in a copper mug "by tradition" (a wholly fabricated tradition).

The Mule remains a simple drink—vodka, lime juice, and ginger beer. It's also a perfect cocktail for fall, with a citrusy nod to summer, augmented with gingery ballast to hint at winter holidays to come. Since 2012, Seed Kitchen & Bar in Marietta, Georgia, has served a fine twist on the Mule dreamed up by bartender Chris McNeill, adding a ginger-lemon syrup for both brightness and depth. Seed's beverage manager, Sarah Berman, prefers Barritt's ginger beer from Bermuda. "It's a great example of traditional ginger beer," she says.

As for vodka, Seed goes with Wheatley, by Buffalo Trace Distillery. The Kentucky maker wields the same hard winter wheat that finds its way into some of its noted bourbons, and bottles Wheatley at a slightly higher proof than most other vodkas to give it a bit of spine. But be promiscuous—try others. Taste a difference? Please report back. ☐

Seed Kitchen & Bar's Moscow Mule

Yield: 1 cocktail

INGREDIENTS

2 oz. Wheatley vodka
¾ oz. ginger-lemon syrup (recipe follows)
½ oz. lime juice
Barritt's ginger beer
2–3 dashes celery bitters
Mint sprig, for garnish

PREPARATION

Place the first 3 ingredients in a cocktail shaker and shake with ice until chilled. Strain into a copper mug filled with fresh ice. Top with ginger beer and stir gently. Dash bitters on top and garnish with mint sprig.

For the ginger-lemon syrup:

INGREDIENTS

2 cups simple syrup
1 (3-inch) piece of ginger root, peeled and sliced thin
5–10 Thai basil leaves
Zest of 1 lemon
1–2 Thai chiles, stemmed and sliced in half lengthwise
3 oz. fresh lemon juice

PREPARATION

Combine all ingredients except lemon juice in a saucepan and bring to low boil for 5 minutes. Add lemon juice and simmer for 15 minutes. Let cool, strain, and bottle. Yields 2 cups; leftovers will keep in the refrigerator for up to a month.

NIGHT Out



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WHAT'S IN SEASON

How Sweet It Is

STOCK YOUR PANTRY
WITH SORGHUM
SYRUP AND IT JUST
MIGHT BECOME YOUR
FAVORITE CONDIMENT

By Jenny Everett

From hot sauce to rémoulade to Old Bay, smearing, drizzling, and sprinkling our way to bonus flavor is a Southern sport. And if you're looking for a hit of sweetness, chefs like Rob Newton, the executive chef at the Capital Hotel in Little Rock, consider sorghum syrup the MVP of the pantry. "I think of sorghum as the workhorse you can use in a lot of different ways," he says. "It's not as delicate as maple syrup, which you don't want to cook with. And it doesn't have that burnt sugar, bitter quality blackstrap molasses can have. It's sort of right there in the middle."

Sorghum grows similarly to corn—tall and in rows—with a cone-shaped seedpod at the top. In sweet varieties, pressing the stalk releases a juice that producers can cook down into syrup. Sweet sorghum grows happily in much of the South, where it's been cultivated since the 1850s. It's generally harvested in the fall—after summer heat has waned but before the frost settles in—and you can spot fresh syrup at farm stands and markets (or find it bottled at specialty stores year-round). Stash a bottle in the pantry and use it as a sub for molasses in most any recipe, or get creative: Add a dash in an old-fashioned, drizzle it over roasted carrots or sweet potatoes, or try it in a marinade, as Newton does for sweet and sticky ribs (see recipe). When in doubt, pair it with something buttery. "My first memory of the dark syrup is drizzling it over biscuits at breakfast," Newton says. "Butter and sorghum are just really special together." ☐



THE CHEF RECOMMENDS:

Crispy-Sticky Sorghum-Soy Spareribs

Yield: 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsp. soy sauce
3 tbsp. sorghum syrup
2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
1 tbsp. ketchup
1 tsp. mustard
2½ to 3 lb. spareribs (cut into individual ribs)
2 tbsp. benne or sesame seeds

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, mix soy sauce, sorghum syrup, vinegar, ketchup, and mustard. Add ribs and toss. Cover and refrigerate for 12

to 24 hours. To cook: Preheat oven to 250°F. Place ribs on a baking sheet lined with foil (leave enough extra to fold over them). Pour any remaining marinade over the ribs. Fold sides of foil over ribs, seal tightly, and place in oven. Check after 1 hour; when ready, they should be falling off the bone (this could take as long as 2 hours). When they're done, remove from oven and turn broiler to low. Line another baking sheet with foil and spray or

rub it with oil. Carefully transfer ribs to the foil-lined sheet, and reserve juices in a small bowl. Brush ribs with juice, and place under the broiler for 5 to 10 minutes, continuing to baste with juice until golden and crispy. Sprinkle with benne or sesame seeds and cook about a minute more (be careful not to burn them!). Serve with slices of cucumber, shredded cabbage, dilly beans or pickled okra, hot sauce, and white sandwich bread.

MUST-HAVES FOR THE Modern Host



Ever since I can remember I have always gravitated toward the bold, the impactful, the inspiring—it's as though my first language has always been design—lush colors, intricate patterns, and inviting textures have always spoken to me. This deeply rooted love has led me to where I am today, living, breathing, and absolutely obsessing over all things design. I'm Suly Weissman, Design Specialist for Thermador. I believe in living exceptionally every day. And with Thermador appliances, you can too. Check out my absolute favorite products that are sure to add spice to your life...and your kitchen.

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BY JOHN T. EDGE

Passage to India

KHANA INDIAN GRILL BRINGS A HOMEMADE TASTE OF THE SUBCONTINENT TO BURGEONING NORTHWEST ARKANSAS



Bhel puri was my gateway to the regional cooking of India. Back in the early nineties, I fell for this earthy toss of puffed rice, potatoes, peanuts, chickpeas, chutney, and more. Most likely born of Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra, the dish is a decadent salad, a sweet, sour, and bright mix of chewy and crispy bits. Now, each time

I dine at Khana Indian Grill in Fayetteville, Arkansas, I begin with bhel puri, because the restaurant's take, served on heart-shaped plates made from pressed palm fronds, does something almost impossible: It tastes better than my memory.

Wife-and-husband proprietors Lisa and Abhijeet Purkayastha imagined Khana to introduce modern Indian cooking to a broad swath of people. Instead of a thick dossier of curried hits from the Indian American playbook, the Khana menu is lean: snacks, rice dishes, rolls, and sides, plus combo plates and one dessert, rice pudding perfumed with cardamom and bergamot. They also serve drinks, including a buoyant mango lassi and an iced coffee laced with cardamom and brightened with orange.

Naan and tikka dip, bhel puri, the thaali combo, chutneys, and more; Abhijeet and Lisa Purkayastha.

Along with the bhel puri, I like their tikka dip. Served with warm slices of naan, based on the tomatoey sauce that usually drenches chicken tikka, it tastes, in the best possible way, like the money dish from a Mumbai Ruby Tuesday. The Purkayasthas and their crew also make beautiful khati rolls, long popular in Kolkata, in the state of West Bengal, which Abhijeet considers his cultural home. I like the turmeric potato-stuffed version, which comes with cilantro, onion, and mint-yogurt chutney.

The look of Khana is lean, too. If you know how a 1970s Wendy's looked, with bathrooms tucked at back right and a drive-through window on the left midflank, you will recognize those bones in Khana, which opened in the former fast-food box in 2015 across College Avenue from a new Wendy's. Lanterns made of punctured metal hang from a blacked-out ceiling. Oversize paisleys frame the order counter.

Lisa, who descends from Choctaw people in Oklahoma, and Abhijeet, who emigrated from the city of Chennai on the Bay of Bengal, met in Houston, where they worked at an advertising agency. They began a leather manufacturing and import business at their dining

Ice Cream Dreams

A Bentonville stop for stellar scoops

Owned by Himabindu "Bindu" Sreepathy and her husband, Raja Bavirisetti, **Kwality Ice Cream & Grill** offers mango-pomegranate, saffron-pistachio, and other delicious ice creams. Part of a national chain, this location, in a Bentonville, Arkansas, strip mall, also serves snack foods conceived and cooked by Sreepathy, including a lamb frankie sandwich, folded into a paratha like a Cal-Indian burrito.

—J.T.E.

room table before moving to Fayetteville in 2006. When cheaper Chinese goods flooded the leather market, the couple planned a restaurant that would interpret the foods of Abhijeet's youth. His mother taught Lisa to cook traditional dishes. That meant learning how to toast and grind whole spices, Lisa told my Southern Foodways Alliance colleague Annemarie Anderson in an oral history interview, and how to mix tapioca pearls with potatoes and peanuts for fritters called sabudana vada.

Northwest Arkansas often gets referred to as NWA. Four cities anchor the tight-knit region of more than five hundred thousand: Fayetteville, Bentonville, Rogers, and Springdale, along with a booming public university and a constellation of smaller towns. Between 2010 and 2019, NWA grew faster than all but twelve metro areas in the United States.

That growth has yielded great complexity, defined over generations by new arrivals who came here in search of work. Late in the nineteenth century, Italian immigrants left the cotton fields of the Delta

to farm grapes. Mexican immigrants came in the mid- to late twentieth century to work chicken plants. More recently, South Asian people arrived to work information technology jobs at the locally headquartered Fortune 500 companies Walmart, J. B. Hunt Transport, and Tyson Foods. Cricket leagues play matches on baseball fields, athletes bike old and lush woods on new trails, and two museums—fueled by Walmart's success and underwritten by Walton family money—have tilted the axis of the contemporary art world. (While benefits have accrued here, you can also argue that Walmart's pay structures and pricing have had destructive effects elsewhere.)

The positive impacts on NWA food culture have been dramatic. Over the last five years, I've traveled here five times to drink pour-over coffees made with single-origin beans, snack on shell-bean hummus, eat dinners of fried chicken and spaghetti drrenched in red gravy, enjoy breakfasts of chilaquiles drizzled with sour crema, and savor takeout lunches of goat biryani. That said, the food and drink that now beg my

return come from Khana Indian Grill.

After the pandemic began, the Purkayasthas shifted to serve most meals from that old takeout window. This past summer, Khana customers gathered at picnic tables and a clutch of Adirondack chairs, set in the grass apron out front, where pots of wildflowers and shrubs served as dividers between virtual booths. Umbrellas made in the state of Rajasthan, decorated with mirrors and elephants and sequins and paisleys, gave shade and reflected the playful vibe of the temporarily closed dining room, blocked from view by garlands of faux marigolds.

Business remained good in the months after the novel coronavirus began to spread. Khatai rolls proved ideal takeaway lunches. Noting the success of Chai Pani, based in Asheville, North Carolina, with a branch in Georgia and other affiliates, Lisa and Abhijeet now talk about expansion. My hope is that they make that leap, and that, soon, bhel puri gilded with chutney will become as common across the South as fried cauliflower bites dipped in ranch. ☐



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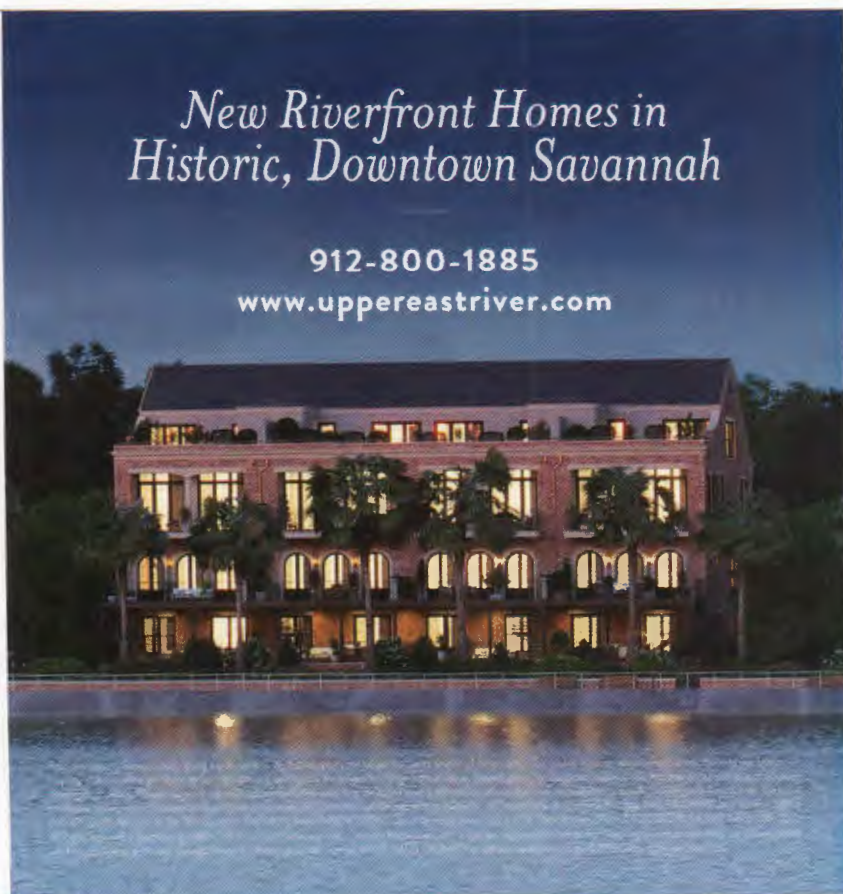
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The Soul of Mississippi

FROM THE HILLS TO THE COAST, THE MAGNOLIA STATE CELEBRATES ITS HERITAGE THROUGH FOOD

You never forget your first drive through Mississippi. Following the highways that crisscross the state, one minute you're winding through farmland and tree-dotted hills and the next, the landscape opens to reveal a breezy shoreline. Here, a unique culture thrives on heritage and diversity, and nowhere is it more apparent than in the culinary scene. From dining institutions to family kitchens, Mississippi's rich histories come together in iconic dishes passed down for generations.

In Mississippi, culinary identity is built on tradition. Take, for example, the tamale. Native to Latin America, tamales have origins in the Delta that date back to the turn of the twentieth century or earlier, when migrant workers flocked to the region. Today, the steamed corn husks filled with pork, spices, and masa are inherent in the state's cuisine, found at countless restaurants and corner carts. To connect the multitude of vendors, in 2005 the Southern Foodways Alliance created the Hot Tamale Trail, maintaining a restaurant map and oral history that documents the dish's significance. A good place to start? Hicks' World Famous Tamales & Banquet Hall in Clarksdale, where Eugene and Betty Hicks have been perfecting the art of the tamale since 1970.

While a few universal themes ring true—a love for catfish, sweet tea, and world-class barbecue each corner of the state has a flavor of its own. The Capital/River region, for example, is home to a mighty river, stately mansions, and beloved eateries putting their own spin on tradition. In Jackson, legendary burger shop Cool AI's has been slingin' patties for decades and is also known for standout vegan versions of nearly every menu item. In the Pine Belt to the east, Catfish Alley in Columbus is a must-stop. The historic street got its name from

the fishermen who delivered fresh catches to local restaurants in the nineteenth century, and today, nearby Cajun-inspired spots Huck's Place and J. Broussard's still serve some of the best catfish dishes around.

Of course, fresh seafood also stars on the Mississippi coast. In Gulf-skirting Pascagoula, Bozo's Seafood Market & Deli is lovingly known as one of America's favorite dives, and one bite of the shrimp po'boy shows why. Meanwhile, with the abundance of history in the state's northernmost Hills region, traditional soul food isn't hard to find, from Aunt B's in Tupelo to Oxford's beloved Ajax Diner.

Like the state's wide-ranging landscape, Mississippi cuisine is a great many things. There's only one way to truly experience it all—bust out a map, hit the road, and always come hungry.

From left: A classic cheeseburger at Ajax Diner; J. Broussard's chicken and waffles (photo by Mary Gainza); the Cajun-style shrimp and grits at Huck's Place.

Ultimate Tasting Tour

Trek across Mississippi and you'll discover a slew of iconic dishes, from flaky biscuits and fried chicken to burgers slathered with comeback sauce.

Read on for where to find some of the state's tastiest morsels.

Biscuits:
BISCUITS & BLUES
Natchez, MS
BiscuitBlues.com

Catfish:
TAYLOR GROCERY
Taylor, MS
TaylorGrocery.com

Comeback Sauce:
MAYFLOWER CAFÉ
Jackson, MS
MayflowerCafeMS.com

Fried Chicken (with the Waffle):
THE GATHERING
Flora, MS
LivingstonMercantile.com

Fried Chicken (without the Waffle):
THE MIDTOWNER
Hattiesburg, MS
TheMidtowner.net

Fried Dill Pickles:
THE DINNER BELL
McComb, MS
TheDinnerBell.net

Delta Tamales:
HICKS' WORLD FAMOUS TAMALES & BANQUET HALL
Clarksdale, MS
Facebook.com/HicksTamales

Seafood Po' boys:
BOZO'S SEAFOOD MARKET & DELI
Pascagoula, MS
BozosSeafoodMarket.com

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GOOD HUNTING

SOUTHERN ACCENT

Creeping Beauty

THE SOUTHERN SMILAX VINE ADDS
DRAMA TO THANKSGIVING CENTERPIECES

By Haskell Harris

Southern smilax can act a little like its sister plant wisteria, swallowing things whole in the wild with swirling tendrils. But that free-spirited look has also earned the vine a fan club among Southerners, who forage the trailing evergreen to use as wedding decor or to drape on holiday mantels. For a Thanksgiving centerpiece, consider pairing smilax with orange and peach dahlias and red zinnias, which bloom until first frost. "I love the freshness of using foliage with a vibrant fall palette and letting the vine drop from the table to the floor," says Sara York Grimshaw, the Charleston, South Carolina, floral designer who created this arrangement. In wooded areas, "look for a thick vine climbing into the trees," she advises, "and bring your gloves because some smilaxes have sharp thorns." 

The Mix: Ball dahlias and zinnias (or you can substitute roses), pomegranates, crocosmias, viburnum berries, chestnut pods, and smilaxes.

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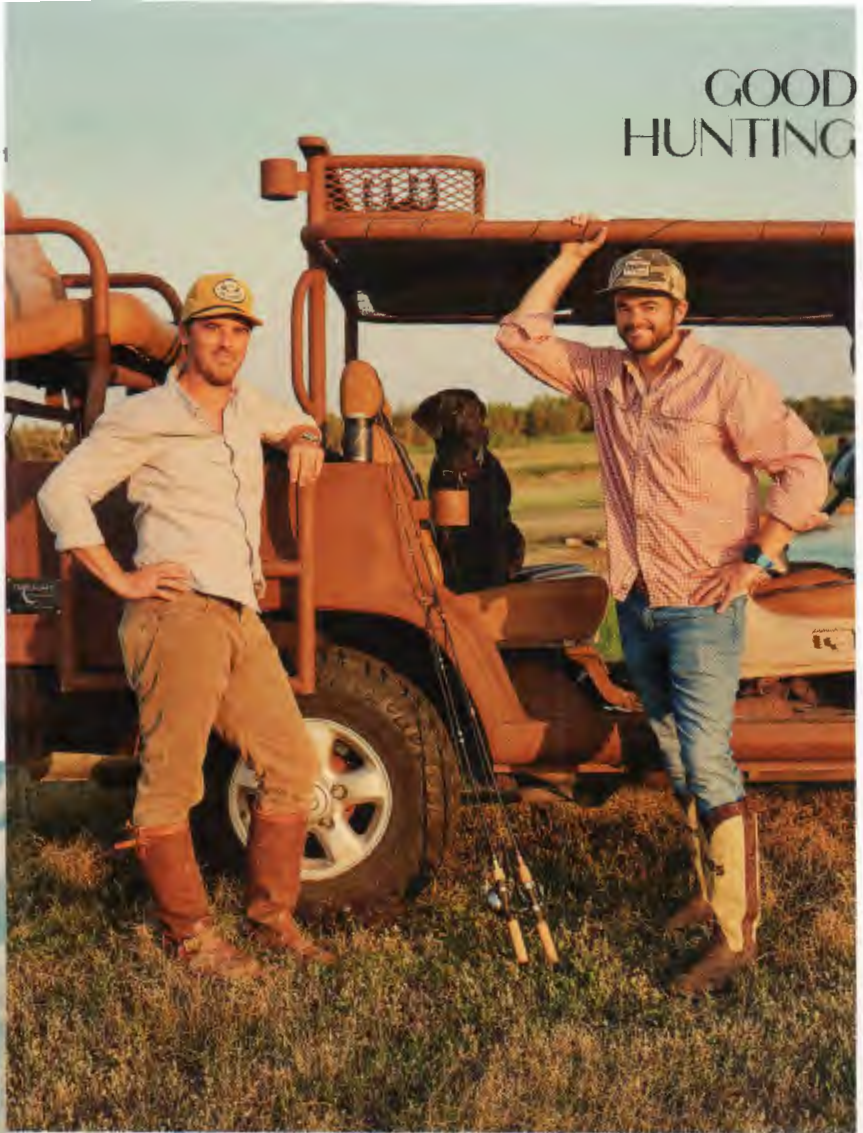
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BLADE AND BOW
KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY



Clockwise from above: Agave and prickly pear cactus on Paloma Ranch; Roy (left) and Ryan Seiders, with dog June in a quail rig; the entry gate.



HOMEPLACE

Texas Double Take

*THE BROTHERS BEHIND YETI
CREATE A STRIKING HUNTING CAMP
FOR THEIR FAMILIES*

By Tom Foster

Certain times of year, when you walk outside these walls, you better have your head on a swivel,” says Ryan Seiders, one half of the founding duo of the coolers-and-camping-stuff company Yeti. He and his brother Roy, the other Yeti founder, are ambling around the twin hunting lodges they had built at Paloma Ranch, a seventeen-thousand-acre spread of mostly raw land they bought a few years ago in far South Texas, a couple of hours south of San Antonio

and minutes from the Mexican border. It’s rough country here—mesquite brush, huisache, prickly pear, relentless sun, rattlesnakes.

Ryan gestures to the waist-high smooth white wall that surrounds the two houses and the pool between them: a snake wall, he explains. The reptiles can’t climb it. With eight young children between the brothers’ two families, there are often a lot of little people running between the houses and splashing in the pool. “You don’t want to have to worry about them.”

Everything about the ranch reflects that utilitarian

GOOD HUNTING



Everything about Paloma Ranch reflects a utilitarian ethos. "We just want to be able to come in here with our ranch boots on and not worry about a thing," Roy says. And yet, if the lodges look at first glance like a pair of particularly nice sheds for heavy equipment, they're decidedly homey as well



From top: The shared pool and patio between the lodges; Ryan's kitchen and dining area, featuring midcentury pendant lights and cowhide-covered dining chairs; the lodges and surrounding snake wall, from a distance.

ethos. The homes themselves, which the families frequent for weekend getaways during deer season, are simple rectangular boxes with corrugated-metal exteriors and industrial-scale, steel-framed windows overlooking the landscape. Oil-field pipe frames the covered patio. Inside, the floors are nothing more than polished concrete. ("We just want to be able to come in here with our ranch boots on and not worry about a thing," Roy says.) When nobody's there, black metal doors slide down to seal off every entry.

And yet, if the lodges look at first glance like a pair of particularly nice sheds for heavy equipment, they're decidedly homey as well. Credit Emily Seiders for that. She's Ryan and Roy's sister-in-law (married to brother Rick) and an interior designer in Austin whose work often blends organic shapes and materials with clean, modern architectural lines. That mix plays just right at Paloma Ranch, where the homes each have a long central hall flanked by five bedrooms, ending in a wide, loft-ceilinged living/dining/kitchen space that faces a wall of windows. Emily worked on the project with the architect Ryan Street, a frequent collaborator of hers—including on Roy's and Ryan's homes in Austin—and the brothers' childhood friend. In another design team's hands, the living areas might have felt severe, but here they func-





tion as a canvas for expressing the Seiders family lifestyle.

What that means varies slightly between Ryan's and Roy's houses. ("Ryan's look is more bohemian," Emily says. "Roy is more earthy.") But both homes include a stylistically wide-ranging selection of art, rugs, and furniture that, she says, shouldn't work together but do because they're naturally tied to the people and place. Emily says she chose many of the items—such as the hand-tooled-tin four-poster bed from Mexico in Ryan's master bedroom—"to pay homage to the various cultures who have historically inhabited the region, from Spanish settlers to Native American tribes to the cattle barons of Texas."

The houses each borrow from traditional Western decor—as in leather and antlers—but give it a contemporary profile. Rather than nailhead trim and overstuffed pillows in Ryan's home, a pair of vintage buffalo-leather recliners feature the sleek lines of the Swiss design house de Sede. Cowhide-upholstered dining chairs sit atop colorful metal bases. In Roy's living room, a mounted Spanish Fighting Bull hangs on one wall, opposite a glowing replica of the Paloma Ranch brand by the Austin neon-sign master Evan Voyles.



Clockwise from left: A table in Roy's hallway, with a midcentury lamp and artwork by the Austin painter and sculptor Paul Meyer; a windmill at sunset; snake boots and a bootjack in Ryan's mudroom; an image by the Dallas photographer Steve Wrubel, a vintage Spanish chair, and a tumbleweed at Roy's.



GOOD HUNTING



chaps out here all the time,” Roy explains, so he hopes he and his brother can add to the collection over the years to come. Given the amount of time everyone spends outdoors when they’re here, properly breaking in a few pairs shouldn’t take long.

Days start early at Paloma, with a hunting party usually gearing up in the walk-in gun safes at the far end of each home’s central hallway. When they return, they unload the day’s bounty in the deer barn (complete with ceiling-mounted sliding game hooks that lead from a driveway into a walk-in freezer) just up a path from the houses. Then they join the rest of the fam-

The eclectic mix continues throughout each room at Roy’s. A red shuffleboard table; a painting of the local landscape by family member Jim Gingerich; a series of images taken by Texas’s official state photographer, Wyman Meinzer; mounted deer hunted on the ranch; arrowheads found on the property; two giant kitchen pendant lamps taken from a Belgian warehouse.

One collection that perhaps best characterizes the ranch’s aesthetic: vintage chaps hanging in Ryan’s hallway. “We wear

ily around the pool and outdoor lounge area, where the prevailing winds blow in from the southeast and keep everyone from melting. At some point a handful of guests might wander over to the shooting platform just down from the deer barn to shoot trap. Someone will be cooking by then, and eventually people will convene at the fourteen-person outdoor dining table, then retire to drink tequila around the firepit—and plan the next day’s hunt.

For a couple of outdoorsmen who grew up hunting in the Texas Hill Country, where



the deer are smaller, this piece of unforgiving country is the Seiderses’ version of a slice of heaven. They sold a controlling interest in Yeti several years ago and no longer have day-to-day involvement in the company, so they spend much of their time managing their land. “Ryan and I never thought we’d be fortunate enough to buy a place down here,” Roy says, “so when we got to that point—to be able to purchase a raw piece of land and make it our own—it was kind of a dream come true.”



Clockwise from top: Paloma-branded rugs at Roy’s; buffalo-leather recliners and Dolan Geiman artwork in Ryan’s living room; a hammered-tin bed in Ryan’s master bedroom; June relaxing outside.

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By Haskell Harris

■ This brilliant marriage of a swing and a bed, upholstered in teal Sunbrella fabric and made by the artisans at Southern Komfort in Alabama, offers an idyllic spot to retreat for coffee on the porch when the heat, humidity, and mosquitoes have diminished (\$5,100; southernkomfortbedswings.com). A dapper plaid throw by Minna (\$280; minna-goods.com) and a hexagonal terra-cotta pot aged to perfection by Campo de' Fiori (\$104–\$198; campodefiori.com) complete a picture of sweet repose.

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in #RealColumbiaSC

YOUR COMFORT LEVEL IS IMPORTANT TO US.

Whether you're ready to travel again now or are simply dreaming up your future travel bucket list, Columbia SC is ready to welcome you back whenever you are. Activities like a nature walk through a State Park, kayaking on one of our three rivers, dining al fresco at a downtown restaurant or an outdoor stroll to take in public art might just be the welcome change of scenery you seek. And while we could certainly go on and on about all the different ways you can experience the region, we thought we'd turn to our 2020 Local Insiders instead to give you their favorite tips, tricks and things to do (safely!) in Columbia SC.

For **Rita Patel**, co-owner of **Hotel Trundle**, being more present with her family has been the biggest silver lining of this new normal. "We hit the brakes and have enjoyed doing those things we never seemed to have time for before like kayaking in **Lake Murray**, picnicking on the **Riverwalk**, picking fresh strawberries and lots of backyard BBQs," she says. Columbia's temperate climate lends itself to year-round outdoor adventure, so take a page out of Rita's book and bring the family along to make lasting memories amidst nature.



RITA PATEL



MILO ANDERSON

Conservation Communications Manager for **Riverbanks Zoo**, **Milo Anderson**, agrees. "We're lucky enough to have **Congaree National Park** less than 20 miles from downtown Columbia and during these times of social distancing, what better way to recharge is there than with fresh air in the great outdoors," he says. Milo recommends going for a stroll on the **Boardwalk Loop**, as it's accessible for people of all mobilities and has plenty of benches along the way. Plus, if you're hungry after hitting the trails, you can't go wrong with **A Peace of Soul Vegan Kitchen**. His top menu pick? "The combination of pickles, homemade sauce, and crunch of their fried "chicken" sandwich on a pretzel bun makes for a sit down, shut up and eat kind of experience."

PHOTO BY BRETT FLASHNICK



CONGAREE NATIONAL PARK

During this time, **Kim Jamieson**, Director of Marketing and Air Service Development for **Columbia Metropolitan Airport**, has enjoyed picking up fresh produce at roadside farmer's stands and tapping into Columbia's cultural opportunities by packing picnics and exploring the beautiful gardens at **Historic Columbia's Seibels House** and streaming movies from **The Nickelodeon**.



KIM JAMIESON



MARK RAPP

PHOTOS BY LUCAS BROWN

And speaking of creativity, "Jazz artists around the world have taken to streaming concerts and in Columbia, we are excelling at this amazing new opportunity," says **Mark Rapp**, local jazz musician and founder of **Colajazz**. Mark and his wife have loved ordering bottles of wine to go from **Lula Drake Wine Parlour**, as well as some food from **The Main Course**, then cast jazz played by top local talent to their TV and have an at-home concert experience.

Between journeying to the outdoors, indulging in the local cuisine and appreciating the arts, our Local Insiders' favorite ways to experience Columbia during this time just may become your favorites, too. Whenever you're ready to come and explore at your own pace, of course.

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■ Snack stations aren't just for guests anymore. Create a place to grab a handmade glass by *Asp & Hand* (\$480 for six; krbny.com) and fill it with iced half-and-half tea poured straight from a dispenser by *AERIN* for *Williams-Sonoma* (\$120; williams-sonoma.com). Or pop a cap off something fizzy and Southern with a mounted bottle opener from *Rockler* (\$10; rockler.com). All beverages deserve a real cocktail napkin such as these autumnal options by *Gerbrend Creations* (\$108 for six; ggfieldshop.com). And display a few treats in apothecary jars from Atlanta's *etúHOME* to tempt everyone who passes by (\$63; etuhome.com).

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TWO CULTURES MERGE IN A VIRGINIA STUDIO TO CREATE ETHEREAL AFRICAN-INFLUENCED FURNITURE

By Latria Graham

Two and a half hours south of Washington, D.C., outside of Columbia, Virginia, in a former three-car garage on the north side of the James River, the designer Jomo Tariku and the woodworker David Bohnhoff are redefining contemporary African furniture. In the studio, African mahogany shavings cover a section of the floor as they collaborate on museum-worthy chairs and stools, and the smell the wood casts off as the day heats up permeates the space.

Born in Kenya and raised in Ethiopia, Tariku came to the United States in 1987. After studying industrial design at the University of Kansas, he eventually moved to the suburbs of D.C., where he works as a data scientist. He based his earliest furniture designs on the three-legged Jimma stools of Ethiopia that he remembered from childhood. All of his pieces tie back to the African diaspora in some way, and many center on his East African upbringing. "When people define African art," he says, "they think of masks and handcrafts, and old things. There is no space for people like me."

Tariku bucks against the modern definition of African furniture, usually relegated to pieces with a Eurocentric aesthetic with a twist, such as colorful batik upholstery. Instead, the large spiral horns of the male mountain antelope found in Ethiopia's Bale region, for instance, inspired his Nyala chair. Highly sculptural in nature, the curving wooden back of the chair seems to defy gravity, serving as a functional marvel. And his MeQuamya chair riffs on the T-shaped prayer staffs used in Ethiopian Orthodox ceremonies, found in rock-hewn churches in the region that date back to the sixteenth century. "I love history," Tariku explains. "Ethiopia is the only African country that was never colonized. So, my perspective is a little

From top: Jomo Tariku's sketchbook; two Nyala chairs in ash; Tariku, in David Bohnhoff's workshop.



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From top:
A MeQuamya chair
in American walnut; a
closer detail; Bohnhoff
and Tariku in the
workshop; tools of
the trade.

different. Our religious art is still there. So are our old manuscripts in our language, in our handwriting. All of that informs my ideas.”

Tariku had all of these designs in his mind but could not find someone with the skills to build them—he had trouble bringing them to fruition with his own hands. For several years, he sent out emails, hundreds of them, to woodworkers up and down the East Coast, searching for someone to collaborate with who had the talent to build the graceful, elegant minimalist designs that have become his signature. In 2017, Bohnhoff, a regionally renowned furniture maker and woodworker based in Columbia, received Tariku’s email, and the pair decided to meet at a furniture show in Richmond.

When Bohnhoff saw Tariku’s sketch of the Nyala chair, he knew he had to try to build it. Quickly, Tariku saw that Bohnhoff understood the intentions behind his designs, and could take them from two-dimensional renderings to pieces that fine furniture lovers would be proud to have in their living rooms. “I saw the challenge in it,” Bohnhoff says. “I saw the beauty in it. I’m always pulling from nautical culture in my work, and every region has its own seafaring aesthetic. I appreciate learning the details of Jomo’s culture and how it helps him generate ideas.”

Bohnhoff’s own creative journey began at a potter’s wheel in middle school. Struggling with academics, he found solace in using his hands to create beautiful and unusual shapes. When he finished high school, he took to boatbuilding, eventually earning a BFA from Virgin-



ia Commonwealth University, and started a career as a boatbuilder, working in shipyards along the way from Maine to North Carolina, studying the art of the curve. Eventually he returned to Virginia, intent on transferring his skills to furniture, freeing complicated pieces from cherry, mahogany, and ash. In his workshop, maple burl logs become masterpieces. The draketail hull of a boat inspired a chair. The interior framework of a canoe transformed into a steam-bent throne.

Designers like Tariku need highly skilled craftsmen like Bohnhoff. The designer works with a few others on certain furniture pieces, but boatbuilding gave Bohnhoff an intimate knowledge of a variety of wood species, and how to bend them to his will without breaking. That technical skill serves him well as his artisanship dovetails with Tariku’s more intricate, curving chair designs, and as they go back and forth on prototypes to refine until form and function perfectly align. While COVID-19 has halted Tariku’s access to furniture shows and showrooms, the duo is currently making each chair to order for interested clients and interior designers—who can inquire at jomofurniture.com—and Tariku is preparing new designs for 2021.

A change in the tide—what they see as the younger generation’s lack of access to apprenticeships and opportunities—has both men worried that relationships like theirs, forged out of mutual admiration for art and a respect for technical skills, are fading. For now, they find solace in creating heirlooms that tell a global story—of Ethiopia, of the Atlantic, and of Virginia. **E**



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BY JACQUELINE KANTOR

Sensitive Subject

A MEDICAL MYSTERY
FLUMMOXES THE OWNER OF A
SCRAPPY PIT-HOUND MIX



C U N E O

In April 2019, I headed thirty miles out of New Orleans to LaPlace, Louisiana, driving along thickets of cypress to a squat veterinary hospital and the closest internal medicine specialist I could find. I dropped off Scout, my three-year-old pit-hound, for an ultrasound, and drove to a coffee shop to wait. As I ate a kolache the size of my forearm, I calculated whether this vet visit would finally overdraw my checking account.

We were here—Scout and I—after more than six months of mysterious medical emergencies that I referred to, in polite company, as “penis problems.” When prompted to elaborate, I usually told

nonmedical professionals that this involved instances of incontinence and...unsheathing...in an otherwise healthy dog. It had been almost a year since I became Scout’s primary owner, and much of that period was marked by urgent visits to the vet, anti-inflammatory prescriptions, and bedsheets changed at 3:00 a.m.

After thirty minutes, I drove back to the hospital, where I sat on the floor clutching a shaking Scout. We were referred to this specialist by his primary vet, who suspected his issues stemmed from prostate cysts, which could require expensive surgery and a biopsy. The specialist pulled up a slide. “Here you can see his prostate,” she said, gesturing to a grainy lump. She pointed out a

spatter of spots: cysts. "It's irregular," she continued, tracing the outline with a finger. "The shape doesn't look normal for a neutered dog of his age."

"Which brings me to the next slide," she continued, scrolling forward. "Did you know he still has a testicle?"

I HAD NEVER WANTED A DOG. I MOVED to New Orleans in 2016, rudderless and jobless. My boyfriend was there, and I loved the blooming jasmine and brass horns and, inexplicably, the humidity, and so it seemed like a nice enough place to stay. He began looking for dogs within a month of our moving in together, despite my protests; it was too soon, I was too new to the city, couldn't we wait? But he insisted, and scoured adoption sites until he settled on Scout, a gangly caramel-colored mix with the stoic, contoured cheeks of a pit bull and the floppy ears of a hound.

Scout came home with us after Thanksgiving. He was skittish and wary of human touch. His foster family had kept him for a month after their neighbor dropped him off on their doorstep with a crate dented with kick marks. The neighbor told them she had picked up Scout on Bourbon Street, where a man was kicking him and ashing cigarettes on his back. She offered the man fifty dollars for the puppy, and he refused. Emboldened, perhaps by a sugary daiquiri, perhaps by something stronger, she picked up Scout and ran. Now he was in my home, thirty-odd pounds of patchy, chai-tea-colored fur, with a white belly speckled with tan spots, and two bright white toes. He had the most expressive eyes I'd ever seen on an animal; bulging, deep features set back in a narrow face that reminded me of, at times, a bat, a rat, or Yoda.

I grew up with golden retrievers my family had adopted as puppies, confident, playful dogs with sunny dispositions that never had a reason to doubt a human's intentions. But Scout was leery at best, neurotic at worst. Thunder would make him nervous, as would light rainstorms, fireworks, bigger dogs, and the neighbor who moved everyone's trash cans on Sun-

day. He was antsy about being alone, even for minutes. Once he became comfortable, though, he bonded quickly. He needed to sleep touching a human, either curled into the crook of a knee or spiraled onto a pillow almost touching my head. We ambled along cracked sidewalks to the park by the Mississippi River and shared frozen mango out of the bag. His fur regrew, and long walks bulked up his sinewy frame. I hauled him onto hand-built rafts along the bayou and held his leash as he eagerly took in his first Mardi Gras parade.

Like any good New Orleanian, he thrived in a costume. Under the TV was a cluster of bandannas—tie-dye, neon, Mardi Gras print—and every few weeks, I laid out three options and implored him to sit on the other side of the living room, his tail thumping vigorously. I'd call him and he'd sprint over, tumbling into my arms and then snatching up a bandanna, thereby choosing his out-

fit. Every morning, he crept to my face as I awoke, sniffing my cheeks and wagging with that same ferociousness, genuinely ecstatic that we both made it to another day.

I had never had an animal so dependent on me; I had never lived in a city that felt so much like home. I fell deeply in love with Scout and New Orleans, and less attached to the relationship that had brought me to them. When the latter finally ended, it was assumed Scout would stay with the man who had chosen him. But I fought, tentatively at first, and later more ardently, to keep him.

When I left, Scout came with me. Now we were both wary. His separation anxiety kicked in, and I was equally apprehensive,

struggling with the emotional and logistical details of leaving a long-term relationship. We spent hours lying out by a friend's pool, and at night we slept on couches and in beds abandoned by friends of friends for summer vacation while I searched for a home. Eventually I found a spot close to the bayou, where we could walk on grassy paths along the water up to City Park.

Soon after I moved into my new house, the problems started. Was it a UTI? Inflammation? Anxious licking while I was at work? His behavior skewed as well;

his barks deepened when the mailman approached, and he growled more at my roommate's visitors. In the fall, I drove him up to my mother's, where he snapped at one of the golden retrievers.

But at night, he pawed at blankets to nuzzle closer into my side, or sprawled out humanlike, with his head on the pillow. I rubbed the velvety folds of his ears and despaired, trying to figure out whether this was karma, or fate, or some combination. I had never wanted Scout, and then suddenly I did, desperately, and perhaps my initial hesitation was coming back to haunt us both. The transfer of ownership from my ex to me had been mostly civil. But I still ached with guilt when I coaxed Scout into the vet's office, tail between his legs, and wondered how many of his issues could be blamed on the turmoil of the past year.

All I had wanted, since the first time he curled up next to me, was to make sure he had the best life possible; to be somewhat worthy of the unconditional love, of the glee he greeted me with every morning. My relationship failed, and Scout suffered the consequences, and here we were, in yet another vet's office, surveying an ultrasound that would cost more than a month's rent.

"Here's the testicle," the vet said, pulling up the next slide. "You did say he was neutered, right?" He was adopted from the shelter in a nearby parish, I told her, and the paperwork noted he had been. There was a chance he could have been born with three balls, she said, but it was rare. It was more likely it was an incomplete neuter, and that the remaining testicle—and associated testosterone—caused not only his funky prostate and "penis problems," but also his spurts of aggression.

Scout and I trotted out minutes later, exuberant. I hadn't failed my closest companion; he had simply been wandering around with one testicle too many! The shelter rechecked its records and confirmed there was something off about the initial neutering, then completed the procedure free of charge. Within two weeks, we were back to our route along the bayou. Within months, Scout had mellowed and matured. We moved into another home, where he lolls on the porch amid fallen fuchsia crape myrtle petals, and I no longer worry about whether or not he was supposed to come with me those years ago. We ended up exactly where we were meant to be. **G**

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BY JULIA REED

When Life Bites

THINGS MIGHT BE ROUGH NOW, BUT TRY ADDING A SWARM OF CREEPY VERMIN



First, a disclaimer: I know that we are in the midst of the most terrifying plague any of us have seen in our lifetimes (unless you are a hundred plus and good for you). I try hard not to stay perpetually mad as hell about our devastating lack of political leadership and the staggering stupidity of a great deal of my countrymen, both of which have cost this nation a whole lot of lives. I am in awe of those on the front lines, whether they be doctors and nurses or grocery store workers, people who fill essential jobs by putting themselves and their families at risk on public transportation, or scientists trying hard to make us see the light and bring us a vaccine. I am not struggling to put food on the table or wondering if I will still have a job. I know I am a lucky so-and-so, that

I am in a position of pretty enormous privilege as I shelter in a swell new house in a place I love.

Mine, as they used to say, are first-world problems, white-people problems. Yes, indeed. However. Even in this cone of comparative luxury, some stuff still manages to penetrate, especially if it comes in waves of successive pestilence. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised—we're already living through the apocalypse. The white horse behind me in the pasture—the one I ply with apples and carrots and affection—could well be the Antichrist, bringer of said pestilence and infectious disease. I'm keeping careful watch. If the pale horse gets here, I'm gone.

It started out a bit slowly. I have mentioned previously on these pages that spring brought an infestation of large, furry brown

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gnats that caused such enormous and infected welts I was practically bleeding to death on my sheets every night. So it was that I did not notice until far too late that my bed—and my bedroom rug and shades and more upholstered surfaces than I cared to count—was infested with bedbugs. Since the pandemic began, I had been forced to stay in exactly one hotel room for a mere two nights, during which I was so worried about COVID-19 that I double masked and gloved and continuously cleansed every possible surface with Clorox wipes. Instead of bringing home the deadly virus, I provided transportation for hundreds of bedbugs, those insidious reddish-brown parasites that bite the exposed skin of sleeping humans and feed on their blood. (Note to self: Quit bringing your own pillows, and pack in plastic bags.) Now, I have read about bedbugs, about how horrible they are and hard to get rid of, but let me tell you that nothing prepares you for them. The first night I noticed the little bastards, they were about the size of a quarter of a penny (i.e., full-grown) and the same color, marching across my pillow in a line. I'd had the doors open for much of the night—I blithely thought they were some kind of beetle I'd never seen, flicked them away, and went to sleep. The next night I woke up to find them on my nightgown. *Hmmm*, I thought, and started Googling away—in the next room. Within a half hour, I knew what I was up against, and it wasn't pretty.

I blame it on the gnats. If I hadn't already been bleeding like crazy from their bites, I would have realized that most of the blood was coming from an even more evil source.



AT THE END OF THE THREE DAYS, I WAS DELIGHTED TO CLIMB BETWEEN SOME NEWLY LAUNDERED SHEETS AND GET WHAT I HOPED WOULD BE A RESTFUL NIGHT OF SLUMBER

The bedbugs start out tiny. I'd brush what seemed like thousands of minuscule brown specks off the bed and all that was left of them would be pinpoints of blood—mine. What to do? I called our local Orkin man. He is a very nice fellow but has little experience with this stuff. He came over in a white plastic suit, sprayed a bunch of chemicals everywhere, sold me a nylon mattress cover that turned out to be useless, told me to get out of the house for a few hours and leave the bedroom doors shut for three days. Okeydoke. Problem solved. I slept on the living room daybed, which I quickly discovered is good for the occasional guest too drunk to drive home but extremely bad for relatively sober people trying to get some actual sleep. At the end of the three days, I was delighted to climb between some newly laundered sheets and get what I hoped would be a restful night of slumber. The next morning it looked like a slasher had visited. Clearly, it was time to leave town, a move that required me to take a steaming hot shower, cover my feet in garbage bags, and walk out of the house completely naked, whereupon I put on a waiting set of brand-new clothes and shoes, got in the car, and left for New Orleans. It was, a website assured me, the only way not to take the bugs with me.

While I was gone, an expert came in from Jackson, a steam cleaner cleaned all the furniture and rugs, every single piece of clothing from my closet and drawers was removed and laundered, far too many tote bags full of "important papers" I'd yet to go through were boxed up and taken away, and the expert came back to make sure the bugs had not returned. This was not an inexpensive enterprise, I assure you, but I swear I would have paid pretty much anything to get those critters out of there. I came home. It was lovely. My house was my haven again. And then, the bats came.

Let me hasten to say, I've always liked bats. My friend Helen Bransford loves them so much, I once gave her an eighteenth-

century print of one for Christmas. They eat mosquitoes, and they mostly keep to themselves. As a child, I loved watching them swoop over our backyard pool when the light was on. But you know, the pool was far away from the house and my affection for bats might really have been sort of a theory. Still, I was not *all that* traumatized on the first night, when I noticed something strange and brown under one of the dining table chairs. A friend was with me, and we shooed it out the door. I live in the country, in the Mississippi Delta, a place that really never should have been inhabited—all the areas outside my doors are sprinkled with some kind of snake-away powder, a version of the goofer dust of old. We figured the poor thing had flown in somehow, lost its way out, and that would be that. Two days later, I got up to brush my teeth and one was in the sink. I am not at my tip-top best early in the morning in the first place, but this pretty much did me in. First, I grabbed the nearest thing to hand, toilet paper, with the intention of grabbing him. Who was I kidding? I immediately flooded the sink with water, put a cookie sheet with a stack of books on top—but not before I saw a little hand reach up. I have to confess that got me. It also turns out that it's illegal to kill a bat in Mississippi. One friend was so concerned about my bat karma she insisted I build a bat house. I actually considered this until the next bat turned up in the bathtub and another, grotesquely dried up and dead, in an empty cachepot.

The Chinese believe bats have such highly developed sensory parts that they can sniff out "auspicious chi" and that their presence heralds good fortune. But there's also Dracula. So again, I fled the house (but just to my mother's, down the road), and again, called in the experts. The same outfit with the bedbug department also has its own bat man. I'm not kidding. He informed me that bats need no more than a half-inch opening to slip into your house. Naturally,

the mesh atop my chimney was a half inch rather than the specified quarter inch. The man spent a great deal of time with my carpenter identifying a dozen more possible entry points. We went to Lowe's, got some stuff to fill them up, and another pest, I hoped, had been dispatched.

At this point, my friend Ellen asked me if I'd killed a bunch of little babies earlier in life. You might well wonder. Because next came the fleas. Henry, being the perfect beagle dog, has had fleas only once in his fourteen years, and that doesn't count because we were in Florida. But there they were, hopping around like madmen in my bed, a.k.a. the Battleground. I checked Henry—not a flea on his precious belly. I checked my own arms and legs—red bites everywhere. I thought of giving up, of torching the freaking house (or at least burning the bed, à la Farrah Fawcett), of riding away on the white horse, exacting revenge on...whomever. Instead I poured a stiff drink and left a message for the Orkin man.

After the fact, nothing is ever as awful as you think it is, but I could have used a little help, a breather, a place to blow off some steam and take the immediate edge off. Which brings me back to the lunacy of our great leaders and the legions of folks who were drawn to the words of a woman who warns against "demon sperm" and believes Big Tech is suppressing a cure and masks are unnecessary (though it's sort of irresistible not to warm to her theory that reptiles are running the government). This is the kind of crap that is keeping the rest of us out of our beloved restaurants and bars, the places that have always provided solace, even joy, during times of trouble, or, yes, pestilence.

Had I been able to make the short drive downtown to the Grille, and had Don the Most Excellent Bartender set down before me a perfect martini with an olive and the faintest shards of ice floating in the stemmed glass, all would have been far better in my world—the daybed less uncomfortable, the bedbugs, etc. less pesky. You share a few tales of woe with your fellow men, and your own seem to fade. Cold gin, camaraderie—hope!—win the day.

So let us strive to fill these beacons of light and life soon and do anything we can to help keep them alive in the meantime. Until then, I'll be keeping a watchful eye on the pasture. 📺

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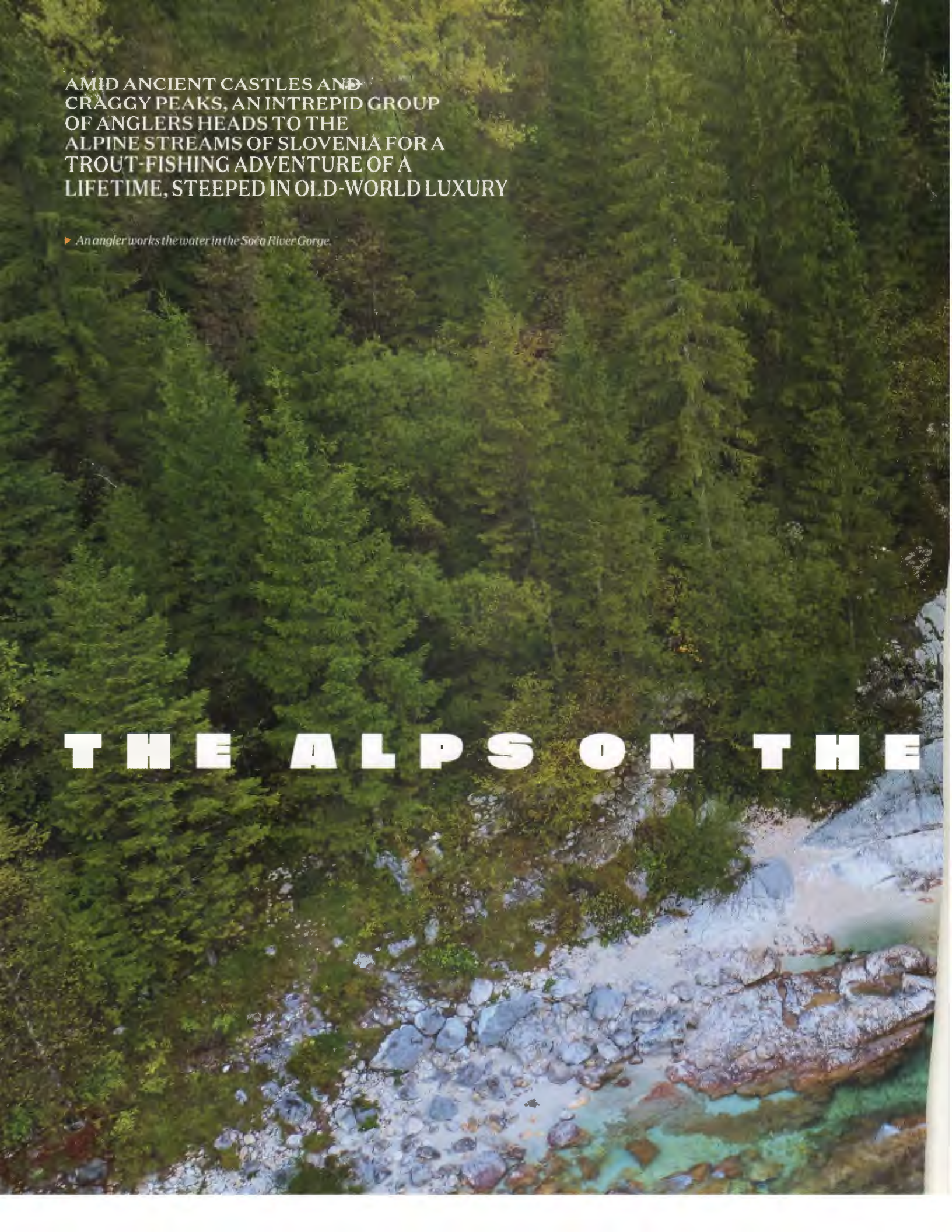
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AMID ANCIENT CASTLES AND
CRAGGY PEAKS, AN INTREPID GROUP
OF ANGLERS HEADS TO THE
ALPINE STREAMS OF SLOVENIA FOR A
TROUT-FISHING ADVENTURE OF A
LIFETIME, STEEPED IN OLD-WORLD LUXURY

► *An angler works the water in the Soča River Gorge.*

T H E A L P S O N T H E





FLY

BY
CHARLES DAINES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
WILLIAM HERFORD

S

"SO, DO YOU WANT TO FISH YOUR WAY, OR DO YOU want to *catch* fish my way?" asked my young guide, Lesly Janssen, as we drove up the Soča River valley to the river's topmost beat on our first morning together.

I allowed as how, short of dynamiting them, I was happy to catch fish in whatever way worked best, no matter whose it was.

"Good," said Lesly, with the relieved smile common to guides everywhere when they realize they have a pliant client in tow. "I call it 'high-sticking a dry fly.' It may be something you haven't seen before."

And it was—a totally new trick for an old trout dog. And like old dogs of every stripe, I was a slow learner.

What I hoped for on this day was to catch a marble trout—a rare, shy, gorgeously marked salmonid found in only a handful of drainages of the Adriatic basin in Central and Eastern Europe, and a fish I had never seen, let alone caught. The Soča (pronounced "socha") River and its tributaries hold the world's largest population of genetically pure marble trout. They also hold grayling and rainbow trout, and it was on one of the latter that Lesly introduced me to his dry fly technique.



► The Soča River holds large numbers of rainbows, grayling, and the much-prized marble trout. Opposite: A big rainbow comes to the net in the Soča before release.

We had followed a whisper of a path upstream along the river, walking slowly and looking for trout in a series of small, clear pools, and we found the first one no more than fifty yards from where Lesly had parked. As we watched the pale eighteen-to-nineteen-inch rainbow finning in a pool barely large enough to hold it and less than ten feet from where we stood on the bank, Lesly said, "This high up on the river we are fishing these little pockets, with no room for a proper drift. So, I want you to make a short, firm stroke, just a pop between twelve and ten, forefinger on the cork, so that your fly drops before the leader and no more than eight inches in front of the fish. Then use a high rod to float the fly to him with *no tippet* on the water and no drag."

"Uh...right," I said, handing him my fly rod. "Why don't you show me?"

He did and caught the rainbow. It looked easy, but it was not. As we continued upstream, swapping the rod back and forth, I would blow a fish and Lesly would catch one. I would blow one... Then it happened to be my turn on the first marble trout we found. It was holding in an eddy, facing downstream, so we circled around in the trees to get behind it and studied it as it gobbled nymphs, its gills flaring on each take.

"It's a small one, about twenty-four or twenty-five inches," Lesly said, of the fish that can grow to four feet and more than thirty pounds in the Soča. "They are much spookier than the rainbows, so you will have only one shot. Drop the fly with no tippet on the water this time, just between that big rock and the trout's nose."

I finally managed to get it right and caught the fish, then studied it for a minute or two as it lay submerged in Lesly's net. Its flanks were a milky gray-green scrolled with cream marbling reminiscent of Japanese calligraphy. With the possible exception of a male brook trout in fall spawning colors, it was the most exquisite trout I had ever seen.

For the rest of that superlative day, Lesly and I swapped out on fish on the upper Soča, and later on one of its lower beats where the river was much wider, gliding heavily in breathtaking gradients of color, determined by depth, from turquoise to aquamarine to emerald to the verdigris of oxidized copper. Three-quarters of the trout and grayling we caught were on small dry caddis flies—high-sticked. At the end of the day I thanked Lesly for introducing me to the technique, to his ravishing home river, and to marble trout—none of which were like anything I had ever seen before in a lifetime of trout fishing. And that night at dinner with twelve fellow travelers I thanked, then toasted with a glass full of good local wine, my buddy Richard French for introducing our group to something else unlike anything we had seen before: the magical little country of Slovenia.

I HAPPEN TO ENJOY PUTTING TOGETHER HEARTY, convivial groups of friends, men and women, to travel around the world to fish, but also to learn about the cultures in which we find ourselves, to sample (often to excess) the best of local foods and spirits, and to lodge in memorable places. Having once been in the business of fashioning and selling such trips, I know how much work and attention to detail go into making them come off without hitches, and for the past decade or so I have left that work to Richard French, whose Toronto-based company, Slipstream Angling, does it pretty much flawlessly. For twenty-one years, Slipstream has sent anglers to more than 140 destinations in thirty-five countries. Until I came along, those jaunts were solely fishing trips, and I am certain Richard has cursed me many times for introducing another, vastly complicating element to them.

"Some of the people who travel with me, including my wife, don't fish," I told him the first time we talked. "Can you organize a good





alternative itinerary for them with their own guide and transportation?”

“No problem,” Richard said. Since then, our group (self-designated “the A-Team”) has traveled on bespoke Slipstream trips to Cuba, Spain (twice), and Ireland. Each of those trips was so refreshingly new, so hitchhessly organized, that were Richard to recommend a bonefish trip to Lapland, the A-Team would no doubt sign up.

“Slovenia? Really? Slovenia has good trout fishing? I don’t even know where it is,” I said when Richard pitched this trip.

“Trust me, Chuck,” he said. And that was all I needed to hear.

IN THE EVENT YOU ARE AS UNFAMILIAR with Slovenia as I was, here are a few facts to get you in the game. With a population of just over two million, it is bordered by Italy to the west, Austria to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Croatia to the southeast, and the Adriatic Sea to the southwest. In 1991 it became one of the first republics to split from what was then Yugoslavia and become a sovereign state. It is one of the most biologically diverse and water-rich countries in Europe, heavily veined with karst underground waterways and aboveground rivers, streams, and limestone spring creeks. More than half of its nearly eight thousand square miles of territory is covered by forests that support healthy populations of ibex, chamois, red and roe



deer, boars, European wildcats, lynx, wolves, jackals, brown bears... and edible dormice.

Because Slovenia has chosen to live lightly with its wealth of natural resources, *National Geographic Traveler* recently named it the country with the world’s most sustainable tourism. Since civilization there dates back to the Roman, Byzantine, and Holy Roman Empires, there is much in the way of ancient castles, cathedrals, and museums, not to mention spectacular scenery, to occupy all types of tourism, as our nonanglers learned to their delight. But active outdoor pursuits have made Slovenia one of Europe’s most popular tourist destinations, and nowhere are those pursuits better pursued than in the northwestern quadrant of the country near the town of Kobarid, where we began our trip.

A three-hour drive from Venice (the finest gateway city to a fishing trip I know of), Kobarid sits hard by the Soča River, surrounded by the steep peaks of the Julian Alps, on the western edge of the 207,000-plus-acre Triglav National Park, from which spring the Soča’s headwaters. The site of some of the bloodiest battles of World War I between Italy and Austria along the Isonzo Front, commemorated by Ernest Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*, Kobarid is now a sedate, postcard Alpine village of small shops, outdoor adventure companies, and sidewalk coffee shops. Its permanent population of around one thousand swells in the summer and fall to Chamonix proportions with a horde of fit, Lycra-clad, van-dwelling, backpacking pan-European hikers, mountain bikers, rafters and kayakers, mountaineers, hang gliders, paragliders, and rock climbers.

For our four-night stay in Kobarid, the A-Team lodged most comfortably at the Hotel Hvala on the town square, and dined very well indeed at the hotel’s restaurant, and one night—over four hours

► From left: Anglers and guides get a bird’s-eye view of the fish from a footbridge; a pletna plies Lake Bled as Bled Castle rises in the background. Opposite, from left: Working a streamer for big trout; anglers and their guide on the Unica.



and nineteen small courses—at Hiša Franko, a nearby Michelin two-star eatery that has been called one of the world's fifty best restaurants. Over three perfect September days, the nonfishermen toured and hiked in the national park, visited museums and cathedrals, and spent a day in the capital city of Ljubljana. And the anglers...well, we angled.

Known as the "Green Pearl of the Alps," the Soča and its tributaries provide more than ninety miles of extremely well managed (by local fishing clubs) trout fishing, as diverse and technically interesting as you can find anywhere. From the plunging cascades and frothy pools in the rocky canyons of the upper Soča to the wide, preternaturally turquoise blue glides of the lower beats, the river accommodates pretty much all skill levels and techniques. Over three days of fishing, our anglers, of widely disparate trout fishing experience, caught rainbows, grayling, and marble trout up to twenty-eight inches using dry flies, nymphs, streamers, and terrestrials.

On our last day there, my friend Ellen Jackson and I started off blind casting Woolly Buggers for fat rainbows on the lower Soča, then spent the afternoon on the hypertechnical trophy beat of a Soča tributary, the Idrijca, tossing size 22 blue-winged olives on fifteen-foot leaders tapered to 7X in slow, complex, tannin-stained currents for rising brown and marble trout—many of them large and all of them discriminating.

So agreeable was everything about Kobarid and the fishing in the Soča River valley that when we left them, with four nights and three days remaining on our trip, I was concerned that perhaps we had peaked too early. I had nothing to worry about.

On the eastern side of Triglav National Park, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Kobarid, the town of Bled is Slovenia's premier Al-



pine resort destination and one of the most enchantingly sited towns in all of Europe, tucked as it is around the eastern end of Lake Bled and hulked over to the north, east, and west by the snow-topped Julian Alps. The lake is nearly four miles around, almost a hundred feet deep, and a saturated cobalt blue. Near the middle of it—the first photograph everyone takes in Bled—is a rocky islet entirely occupied by a graceful, tall-steeped seventeenth-century church. Across from the island, on the lake's north shore, a castle, part of it dating from the eleventh century, sits atop a sheer three-hundred-foot stone cliff rearing operatically above the water—that's the second photograph everyone takes.

Ducks and swans ply the lake, as do racing sculls and lovely twenty-two-foot flat-bottomed, striped-canvas-topped passenger boats called pletnas, which are rowed by one person standing in the stern and have transported tourists to and from the islet since the 1600s. No motorboats are allowed on Lake Bled, and its perpetual calm, sheltered from almost any wind by the surrounding peaks, has much to do with the fairy-tale charm of the town and its setting. Each evening from the balcony of our room at the Grand Hotel Toplice, my wife and I watched, spellbound, as the setting sun drenched the castle in a spill of gory orange, like a medieval raining down of boiling oil. And on my dawn walk each day along the lakeside promenade, the wide-angle cameras held by throngs of early-rising tourists—all pointed at the islet church and the snowfields on the mountains above it—clicked as incessantly as the hum of cicadas.

The moment I laid eyes on the place, with a feeling of having stepped into a dream, I knew I could not leave Bled without seeing something of it and its fetching countryside without a rod in my hand. So on our first full day there, I took rare leave of my fellow anglers and joined up with the others, their guide Luka Resman, and



photographer William Hereford for a day of touring.

We were ferried by pletna to the islet, crossing the lake in a satiny mist; above us, the dowager faces of ornate nineteenth-century villas peered down through breaks in the woods surrounding the lake. We climbed the ninety-nine steps up to the Church of the Mother of God on the Lake, marveled at its gilded altarpiece, and rang the steeple bell three times for good luck as tourists have done for centuries. Later we toured the castle; took a riverside hike through the spectacular Vintgar Gorge; lunched late at a hunter's restaurant, deep in the woods, which featured on its menu roasted bear paw, wild boar medallions, and chamois soup; and finished off the day at the small country Church of St. John the Baptist, internationally famous for the thirteenth- to seventeenth-century frescoes that grace every inch of its walls and domed ceiling.

Wrapped in mist and drizzle, the entire day had the feeling of an earlier, more stately Europe, a sort of Edith Wharton resonance that was only reinforced by the hotel we returned to that evening. With its mauve drawing rooms, its tuxedoed bellmen and waiters, its large guest rooms furnished with antiques and Oriental rugs, its snug bar and vast sitting area with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the lake and Bled Castle, its private beach and thermal-water spa, the old-world hush of its carpeted corridors on whose walls hang photographs of Prince Charles, the king of Spain, and other European royalty who have vacationed here, the Grand Hotel Toplice makes you want to enter its formal dining room for dinner wearing spats and carrying a calfskin-bound volume of Proust.

Not having gotten that memo, the members of the A-Team we met that night were wearing Patagonia and



► Left to right: A small marble trout; the Church of the Mother of God on the Lake stands tall in the morning light.

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THE WOODS**





CAOL ILATM
12 YEARS
OLD
SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY
This whisky is a hidden gem among the best of the Islay style.
Pure distillation, life of Islay.
1 Litre



large smiles, and carrying nothing, it seemed, but stories of the great fishing I had missed. As does Kobarid on the other side of the park, Bled offers up a movable feast of trout fishing opportunities in more than a dozen rivers within an hour's drive from the town. The largest and most productive of those is the Sava Bohinjka, a classic Alpine river that runs for nineteen miles through glaciated gorges and meadows rich with insect life, and holds, along with its tributaries, large populations of rainbows, grayling, and a few brown trout. As at Kobarid, the fishing out of Bled is managed by fishing clubs that charge a daily fee (usually between \$75 and \$100) and assign anglers to daily beats in order to equalize fishing pressure on the rivers. Again as at Kobarid, the system worked very well for our group on the Sava, since we rarely fished in sight of other anglers and the fishing we had there ranged from very good to the eighty-plus-fish day my trout-crazed friend C. T. Fitzpatrick had in one of the river's gorges.

The rainbows in the Sava can grow upwards of thirty inches, and a healthy percentage of them go over twenty, which makes the decision to fish anywhere else while you are in Bled a difficult one. But Richard French and I prefer spring creeks to all other venues of trout angling, and on the next day our guide, Gregor Štepec, took us to one that is now among my favorite spring creeks anywhere.

An hour's drive southwest of Bled, the Unica meanders in a quintessential chalk-stream stroll for ten miles through meadows and copses of trees, varying in width from twenty to forty feet, and in color from olive to strong tea. Six anglers from our group were spread out along the Unica that day and, fishing slowly and singly, we rarely saw one another. The countryside was as tranquil and comely as a Courbet landscape. The currents and lies of the creek required study—best done, like the casting, camouflaged from the

bank—and the patience to spend a half hour or more fishing fifty feet of water. Like spring creek fish everywhere, the brown trout and grayling in the Unica were shy and finicky, and sometimes too big for the very fine tippets necessary to fool them into eating our size 24 blue-winged olive imitations.

The defining fishing moment of the trip for me, now a lifelong lodger in my memory, was finally hooking—after a dozen or more refused casts to its difficult lie behind a rock and beneath a branch—a grayling close to two feet long, playing it for three or four minutes as delicately as I could, then watching it run back behind its rock, roll, and break off. I felt like applauding the fish!

A BEAUTIFUL, LIFE-LOVING WOMAN AND a good and spunky angler, my pal Melanie Grinney has a knack for summing things up. In a fly shop outside of Bled where she and her husband, Jay, were buying their fishing permits early on the morning of our second day there, the proprietor, a jolly, bearded wine keg of a man, insisted that they could not leave without sharing a “de-stressing” glass of his homemade blueberry schnapps, never mind the hour. Pulling from beneath the counter a bottle and glasses for Melanie, Jay, their guide, and himself, he placed them ceremonially on a glass case holding hundreds of beautifully tied Slovenian nymphs, filled the glasses two or three times, and started everyone's day off with a stressless buzz.

“Soul,” said Melanie, telling us about it at dinner that night. “This Slovenian trout fishing is all about soul!”

► Above, left to right: Enjoying lunch and fish tales after a morning on the Unica; a country vista outside of Bled. Opposite: Loaded for trout—and good times.

BOSS HEN

ON A DREAM TRIP TO CHASE OSCEOLAS IN FLORIDA, A SEASONED MOUNTAIN HUNTER FINDS THE MOTHER OF ALL TURKEYS

BY
DAVID JOY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
AJ FRENA

THE SPORTING SOUTH

THE ROBBLER ROBBLES, and his hens come to him. That's the rule of thumb. He who gobbles loudest, puffs up the biggest, rakes his wings most aggressively against the ground, and hammers his spurs into the most heads gets the girls. At least that's how it appears at first glance.

But picture this: It is the hen who strings the boys along those first few weeks after the winter breakup, the hen who pecks around the woods uninterested in struts and gobbles until she is ready, the hen who makes herself a place and lies down to signal she is receptive to breeding, and the hen who then wanders off to make her nest and raise her clutch alone. She is a bullheaded single mother who needs the old boy for one thing, and she doesn't need him long. She'll put up with the ego till the deed is done, then vanish without so much as goodbye. In a few short days, the king of spring goes from Macho Man Randy Savage to a sack full of lonely, nothing but hollow gobbles and an empty stomach. Make no mistake—the hen sets the terms.

It was the last few hours of opening day for Florida's Osceola turkey season south of State Road 70 when I met the hen that ruled the world. My buddy Raymond and I had driven seven hundred miles from our homes in the North Carolina mountains to a place called Sidell in Southwest Florida, on the outskirts of Myakka Head. Neither of us had ever hunted Osceolas, one of

four subspecies of wild turkey in the United States. My turkey hunting had always been limited to the Easterns in North and South Carolina, while Raymond had taken Eastern turkeys across the South and a Rio Grande from Kansas. We'd both heard tell of Osceolas being the hardest of the four to kill, and perhaps they are, but truthfully we just wanted the chance to get in the woods ahead of schedule. Back home, the season didn't open for another month, and so we traded poplar woods and laurel hells for live oaks and cabbage palms, fern gullies and green briar for Spanish moss and cocklebur. When we left the mountains, there was wood in the stove and the threat of snow. But after a truck stop and Cracker Barrel march down I-75, we arrived in Florida to bluebird skies and ninety degrees.

The ranch comprised 2,300 acres of cattle pasture and oak hammocks encircling a citrus grove, and there were Osceolas all over the place. Out in the fields sandhill cranes stretched their long legs beside Charolais cattle. Owned by a friend of a friend, the J Bar C is not a pay-to-play operation with seasoned guides, but instead an invite-only piece of property that turkey nuts like me would give our left leg to access. I'd blown a shot early morning at a two-year-old gobbler that came out of nowhere, and we'd spent the rest of the day slipping along, trying to familiarize ourselves with the ground so as not to be





blindsided again. By late afternoon we'd come up empty and split up in the hopes of roosting birds for the following morning.

I was leaned against the trunk of a live oak where I could watch a small tractor path between fields and listen for turkeys in the distance. Off to my right, a fence line marked the edge of the property, and on the other side, a narrow swamp emptied to duckweed and muck. A drift of wild hogs had been sloshing their way through the swamp for the last forty-five minutes, their footsteps sucking at the mud. Three yearling does were nosing through the greenery among them when the hen came into earshot.

She fired up over a few cuts and yelps I'd sent across the field with a Cane Creek mouth call. At first I thought it was Raymond answering me, because that's the thing about turkeys when they really get to making noise—it doesn't seem natural. You tell yourself that it has to be another hunter because there's not a bird in the woods that would make that much racket, but they do. Especially the ones running the show, and she was the belle of the ball.

I realized quickly that squawking on a mouth call wasn't going to faze her, and so I pulled a Garrett Fowler pot call out of my vest—aluminum over slate, turned from an oak burl I salvaged out of a cord of firewood—thinking the rasp might match her tone. She yelped and I cut her off. She cut louder and I dug the striker into the calling surface to try to top her volume. Over the next few minutes, we acted out an episode

into her purse without missing a note. She was the kind of hen that would've pulled a jackknife on some gal in a Waffle House parking lot over a man she could take or leave depending on the night. That's the kind of hen every gobbler's really after. The old hen. The boss hen. The hen that'll cut every other girl off mid-sentence and finish what she was saying.

That evening I was nothing more than some homely bird singing the Judds' "Why Not Me" as I yelped off-key on that mouth call. The gobblers didn't so much as glance in my direction, and looking back, who could blame them?

W

ITH BIRDS ROOSTED, Raymond and I set up a blind by moonlight the next morning. Not long after daybreak, the first few gobblers volleyed from the far side of the swamp, and in their echo we heard her cackling and cutting like she'd been up all night just waiting to give them hell.

We had the blind tucked into a windrow between fields with a decoy setup off to our left—a pair of hens and a quarter-strut jake—on a tractor path we thought the birds would use to swap pastures. Soon enough, there they were, at first nothing more than heads peeping over the horizon, then dark silhouettes sifting through oat grass as they slunk into view before us.

At the first strike of the call, one of the gobblers swelled into strut and the other

and I watched as she pulled them on a leash toward the woods, making it clear there would be no coming across.

Knowing we were losing them, Raymond interrupted her with a mouth call. Maybe it was the rasp, the volume, or the tone, or maybe it was those gobblers thinking they were finally hearing a hen that wasn't about to take any lip, but those two toms stopped dead in their tracks as Raymond wailed away. Suddenly one of them turned, and as soon as that happened, the other tom broke stride. They were dumb with love and lust, and for a moment, for one split second, I honestly believed the tide had changed.

But that old hen, seeming to realize that one way or another the boys were going to the bar, slid in between to ruin any chance for a good time. She bumped against them and severed their paths, blocking them from strutting straight in to the setup. After that, she took the lead and dragged them on a wide arc around us. In the end, they came across the field, but they did so on her terms and well out of gun range.

What I know now is that longbeards love bowling-league hens named Tammy. A tom wants a woman who shotguns tallboys of Busch Ice in the Dollar General parking lot, a gal who keeps a few Tijuana Mama pickled sausages in her purse just in case her sugar gets low. He wants a woman whose prized possession is a teacup-sized hunk of fender off Bill Elliott's race car, a woman that'll slide into the Howard Johnson's hot tub in a Reba McEntire T-shirt. A tom finds him a hen like that and he'll never break strut. That was the hen we were up against, and trust me when I say that we never stood a chance.

She pecked around the field behind us for an hour while we watched through the back of the blind, the toms holding tight to her heels. Eventually she showed the boys into the timber, and we slipped out to give chase. We paralleled them for a while through oak groves and thicket, but by the time we reached the last field, I knew the birds were spooked. The ground was littered with shed palm fronds and bootjacks so that footsteps snapped like firecrackers. Raymond took a step, and I heard that hen make the worst sound in turkey hunting—a single alarm putt—and off they went. I saw her zigzag through the oaks, her two boyfriends weaving past palms behind her, as she sprinted for the citrus grove. That fast and it was over. Whether they knew it or not, that woman had saved their lives.

THE OLD GIRL HAD A VOICE LIKE SHE'D SPENT A LIFETIME CHAIN-SMOKING WINSTON 100'S IN A POOL HALL. IF TURKEYS COUGHED, SHE'D HAVE HACKED AND GAGGED AND SPIT SOMETHING INTO A KLEENEX

of Jerry Springer screaming back and forth across that field, and eventually I watched as she led a pair of toms and a small harem of jenny hens under the barbed wire and into the swamp.

The old girl had a voice like she'd spent a lifetime chain-smoking Winston 100's in a pool hall. If turkeys coughed, she'd have hacked and gagged and spit something into a Kleenex, then slipped the tissue back

stretched his neck to thunder across the field, but what those longbeards perceived as harmless flirting didn't sit right with the woman in charge. She clucked and cut and yelped and cussed and I could hear it in her voice as she squalled, "Get in the house, Clydeth! Get in the house or I swear on my mama's grave I'll come upside your head with a frying pan!" She cracked the whip and the boys fell in line. Raymond



THAT AFTERNOON RAYMOND and I split up again, and as a tangerine sun started to sink behind the live oaks, I heard a single shot echo from a quar-

ter mile and knew Raymond had found his bird. With little time remaining and no turkeys in sight, I stood up from my hide and took off, hoping to reach him before the last of the light was gone. I met him coming through a field along the edge of a dry ditch with a purple dappled sky stretching forever behind him. The longbeard he carried had limb-hanger spurs, and jet-black wings unlike any of the Easterns back home.

"That's a damn fine turkey," I sputtered, huffing and out of breath from running.

A slight smile lifted his cheeks. "One of them Osceolee-Os," he said.

Back at the lodge, we poured our drinks a little taller than the evening before. We swapped stories and joked around the supper table with the others in the house, then made a last-ditch plan for our final hunt before heading off to bed. We'd hear that boss hen once more the next morning not long after first light. The gobblers hammered from the roost, but as soon as they hit the ground, she came in cussing like always, and in a matter of seconds she drew them onto a neighboring property and out of our lives for good.

We stayed in the woods till midmorning but never heard or saw another bird. I finally called it quits beneath a wild orange tree with half-eaten fruit and dried peels littering the sandy ground around me. Raymond said we could try moving, but I knew we needed to hit the road, and where we stood seemed a fine place to end it. We took turns swinging sticks at the lowest-hanging Hamlins, and I finished my Florida hunt with citrus juice running through my beard, beaten but smiling.

A few miles into Georgia, Raymond and I stopped and got a hotel room. We bellied up to the bar at a nearby Texas Roadhouse with twenty-four-ounce Bud Lights in frosted glasses—him celebrating his latest gobbler, me drowning my sorrows on my one blown shot. When we got back to the room, I called my girlfriend, Ashley, and told her about that hen and how I hoped an alligator'd swallow her whole.

"I like her," Ashley said, because the most desirable hens always stick together.

As for me, I did what any half-witted gobbler would've done this late in the season. I kept my mouth shut and toed the line, having learned long ago not to argue. **Q**

A GOOSE 77 ABOVE

VIRGINIA ARTIST CAMERON MCINTYRE'S ONE-OF-A-KIND WOODEN DECOYS CARRY ON THE LEGACY OF THE MASTER CARVERS OF OLD. HE LIVES MUCH LIKE THEM, TOO

BY
STEWIE RUSSELL

► McIntyre refines a Canada goose in his backyard studio after chopping out the decoy's rough shape with a hatchet.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ANNA WILLIAMS





IRONICALLY, CAMERON MCINTYRE COULD PROBABLY BAG HIS LIMIT OF DUCKS WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF DECOYS.

Situated as he is, several back roads removed from the main drag through rural Accomack County on the famed waterfowling peninsula of Virginia's Eastern Shore, and more specifically, on 180 acres of brackish marsh and oft-flooded farmland between the Pocomoke River and Bullbegger Creek, he might randomly fire a shotgun out his bathroom window in season with a reasonable chance of success.

Yes, that would be peculiar for several reasons, not least because there is perhaps no more accomplished carver of traditional wooden decoys plying the craft today than McIntyre, using only his calloused hands and a limited arsenal of antique edge tools, as it was done a century and longer ago. Granted, there aren't legions pursuing that particular calling—and that's kind of the point.

"Just a handful of guys are doing it like this, and some of them have jobs and carve on the side," says the fifty-one-year-old as he pencils a few guiding marks onto a knotless block of white cedar inside his garage-sized backyard studio, surrounded by smudged sketchbooks, painting supplies, and dried duck wings of myriad feather patterns. "I basically didn't have any other options. I wasn't going to work in a cubicle somewhere. If I am good at what I do, a big part of it is because I had to get good."

"I think Cameron was born a hundred, maybe two hundred years too late," says Jon Deeter, of the leading decoy auction house Guyette & Deeter, and McIntyre's occasional hunting companion. "He could have been a decoy carver in 1825. He's an old soul, like a Hemingway type. He's just earthy, cool, and very talented."

How talented? "Cameron is the definition of a master carver," says Dan Thiel, the executive secretary of Ducks Unlimited, which along with Guyette & Deeter has used McIntyre's also-considerable skills as a restorer on antique decoys. "It's in the research he conducts and the quality of his work. He truly carries on the tradition of generations of carvers before him."

Chop! Chip, chop! Chop!

McIntyre wields his trusty old Plumb hatchet with dexterity and surprising speed, pausing only to re-evaluate his progress on the white cedar block every dozen or so swings. Sometimes the keen steel blade





shears clean through; sometimes it bites and he pops out the piece with a flick of the wrist. As slivers tumble around his tree-trunk chopping station, the rough ovoid contours of a Canada goose's body emerge. The same labor unveils the goose's head from a bent piece of dense red cedar, chosen to strengthen the long neck.

"When I was young and first heard about guys chopping decoys out with a hatchet, I thought that was neat," he says. "So I gave it a shot, and it was totally awkward. I thought there was no way in hell I was ever going to figure it out."

McIntyre's first attempts at decoy carving actually predate that, when as a boy he ordered a DIY kit from the back of a magazine and inauspiciously laid open his palm at the kitchen table with the plastic-handled knife. The scar is still visible.

But, really, this origin story begins with the artistically inclined boy immersing himself in the natural surroundings of his then home in Beaufort, South Carolina, in the heart of the Sea Islands and the Lowcountry.

"I'd go out and spend the night by myself in my boat in the dead of winter, because I was obsessed with the marshes," he says. That fixation extended to a family tradition of duck hunting. "We always got out there plenty early, before dawn. We'd sit in the blind, and I could hear the pintails whistling over and the mallards quacking and smell the marsh. All that had a big impact on me."

A

FTER THE HATCHET WORK, MCINTYRE places the decoy in a vise he has owned since he was twelve years old and deploys a succession of vintage specialty tools—drawknife, skew chisel, spokeshave—to refine the goose's graceful lines.

"I won't say there are no good tools made today, but almost all of mine are old, like from nineteenth-century Sheffield, England," he says. "You want quality steel, those old Sheffield tools are hard to beat."

He eschews the power tools some contemporary decoy purveyors use to speed up production. Also notably absent are the distractions of a computer or a phone. Or a decent chair, since he believes that stepping back and adjusting his perspective improves the work. As he pulls the drawknife through the cedar in steady arcs toward his chest, it's apparent that McIntyre himself is a well-honed implement in this endeavor, every cut calibrated by his wrists, arms, and shoulders. And since sight and instinct are all that guide each stroke, no two decoys ever turn out the same.

"Even though I've never made a goose that looks exactly like this one, I know where to take off the wood to get the shape I'm after," he says. "It's hand-eye coordination, it's muscle memory, and when you've done it long enough, it happens on a subconscious level. I've spent pretty much my entire life figuring this out."

He's unabashedly partial to carving canvasbacks and puddle ducks—mallards, pintails, teal, gadwall—because he's also unabashedly partial to eating those ducks. "People ask me to make a bufflehead," he says, shrugging, "but they aren't good to eat and I don't shoot them, so I don't make them." Simple as that.

Spend a day with McIntyre and it becomes clear





that unwinding the artist from the sportsman is impossible—one could not exist without the other. Even when he studied painting and drawing for a while at the University of South Carolina and the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, he remained immersed in waterfowling culture. And when he moved to the Eastern Shore after becoming smitten with its landscape and the legacy of carvers such as Ira Hudson and the Ward brothers, his growing reputation as a carver followed.

By then, duck hunters had long since switched en masse to factory-produced, thermoplastic decoys. And as these things tend to go, the decline of the carved decoy as hunting aid was mirrored by its rise as true American folk art, sparking a collectors' frenzy that led to the record auction in 2007 of a single merganser by nineteenth-century Massachusetts carver Lothrop Holmes for an otherworldly \$856,000.

This rarefied marketplace created a niche for McIntyre's work, so influenced by those old masters but more economical. Well, *relatively* more economical, at about \$2,000 per commission, whether he's asked to complete a decoy with a pristine paint job or to create layers of distress to evoke what might have been stashed in Grandpa's shed for fifty years.

"I experiment so much with the paint and the patina that it borders on madness," he says. The majority of a decoy's average three-week turnaround is devoted to painting, with McIntyre applying layer upon layer of oil-based media to achieve what's in his mind's eye, maybe mellow and glowing, maybe dry and salty. And if he doesn't, he starts over.

Naturally, he hunts with decoys of his own design, including a rig of six stunning mallards. Surprisingly, he estimates that 20 percent of his clients drag these collectible art objects into the muck of the field, from Ontario to South Dakota to an undisclosed club's famous hole in Arkansas. Indulgent? Perhaps, he acknowledges, but he draws a comparison to anglers content with an \$800 jon boat while others must have a \$10,000 cedar-strip canoe.

"When you get a decoy from Cameron, you know that nobody else got a similar piece," says Joe Engers, the longtime editor and publisher of *Decoy Magazine*. "It's his own interpretation. He's not making it as much for you as for himself."

Authenticity is an odd notion when applied to an instrument of deception, which is, of course, a decoy's original purpose. But starting with the simple sketches McIntyre draws before lifting his hatchet, he's focused on what is authentic to him, such as knowing that when a duck turns its head, it throws its symmetry a bit off and the tail might tilt in the other direction.

"The number one thing I'm interested in is the sculptural form," he says. "People are starting to appreciate that simple, more primitive things have artistic merit. What I'm doing has a certain quality, but it's not about level of detail. I could make a superrealistic decoy if I wanted to—and I don't want to. I do it this way because that's what I love."

W

HEN MCINTYRE ARRIVES AT A GOOD STOPPING place on the goose, and finds that his wife, Adele, is still frying up a lunch of extra-meaty crab cake sandwiches in the meticulously restored farmhouse they share with their two teenage boys and an affable German shorthaired pointer, he requires little prodding to take a break outdoors.

Adjacent to his spread is a broad indigo twist in the Pocomoke River, marking the border with Maryland on the other side and just a few bends upstream from the Chesapeake Bay. Bygone

► From left: McIntyre's experienced hands shape a canvasback head; the main road leading to his Eastern Shore farm.



watermen landed skiffs here to load tobacco, all the way back to Jamestown settler John Smith making a stop during his 1608 mapping expedition.

It is a stirring view, which McIntyre has captured several times in his other creative endeavor, landscape painting. But not as it appears at this moment, sparkling under a warm midday sun. “I’m a winter person—it can’t be too cold or blowing for me,” he says. “And I love dark, early morning scenes. That comes from hunting a mile deep in the woods at those magic hours. When you come home cold, tired, and hungry, you replay all that in your mind. I like to associate those feelings with the place that I’m painting. It’s got a mystery to it.”

It certainly does. Almost all of his paintings, depicting the marshes, creeks, and pinewoods of his home, capture a solitary murk subtly imbued by a sub-horizon glimmer. The style is impressionistic; McIntyre credits his recently departed mentor, the lauded landscape artist Russell Chatham, as a deep influence.

What you won’t see in McIntyre’s paintings are ducks—or for that matter, *any* fauna. “That’s on purpose,” he says. “I know ducks, and I’d do an adequate job of painting them, but when you have a landscape with a bird in it, that scene is dominated by that bird, like a sailboat on a seascape. Devoid of people or animals, it forces you to relate to something else. It’s pure nature—are you moved by it or not?”

That provocative question also applies to a different sort of waterfowl carving that he has pursued of late. These works aren’t decoys—indeed, they might be considered the opposite, depicting dead birds dangling upside down by their legs, as if after a successful hunt. The *nature morte* sculptures hearken back to nineteenth-century carvings by the renowned American artist Alexander Pope Jr. and seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes. McIntyre renders them softer and more realistic than his decoys, and the effect is transfixing, or unsettling, based on the viewer’s sensitivities.

“These pieces challenge the instant gratification we’ve become

so accustomed to,” says Zac Zetterberg, a curator at the Peoria Riverfront Museum in Illinois, which had six of McIntyre’s hanging game sculptures on exhibition this summer. “There was a time when it was a big deal to have a couple of geese hanging on the barn, because it meant you were going to eat. Cameron lives that sort of lifestyle, and I think he’s trying to get at something.”

McIntyre proudly concludes the tour in the corner of his backyard where he and his sons clean ducks during the season. “I haven’t bought beef from a grocery store in thirty years,” he says. “We live on deer, ducks, geese, and doves. We garden and chop our own firewood. I’m not a survivalist, but I want to live as close to nature as I can. I’m glad I can pass that down to my boys, and I’ve told them they have to do the same when they have kids.”

To that end, McIntyre has put the property into conservation easement with the Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust, which means it will never be sold for development. “Some people think easement means you don’t trust future generations,” he says. “And that’s true, I don’t. There are enough strip malls and parking lots already. This land deserves to be protected.”

Right now, though, there’s the goose decoy to finish, a landscape in progress perched on an easel in the studio’s painting nook, and a fresh commission to ponder. Demand certainly exists to make and sell more work. Still, opening day is approaching, and McIntyre is an artist who knows how to carve out the space he needs to restore his creative spirit.

“If I’m being honest, there was a time when I didn’t work at all from about mid-November until the end of duck season,” he says. “Nowadays, I still devote the whole month of January to being in a blind. Then come February, I’m way behind.” 

BEYOND THE COWEY

► From left: Ricky Kelly, Bobby Harrelson, and the author around the fire post-hunt. Opposite: Evidence of a good day.



FROM HARDCRABBLE ROOTS, A ONETIME FARMER CREATES HIS QUAIL WOODS DREAMS IN NORTH CAROLINA, WHERE GOOD DOGS AND GREAT FRIENDS MAKE MEMORIES THAT STRETCH BEYOND THE FIELD

BY
T. EDWARD NICKENS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
PETER FRANK EDWARDS



THEY ARE BROTHER AND SISTER, TWO ENGLISH SETTERS AS DIFFERENT AS THE DAY IS LONG, AND EACH IS EQUALLY CONVINCED THERE ARE QUAIL ON THE GROUND.

THE SPORTING SOUTH

Dexter worms through cinnamon fern turned auburn in the chill of fall. He takes a halting step and stops, trailing birds on the run. Ten feet away, Emma honors his point, her flanks quivering. Vaulting through open pinewoods, they are a jealous pair, eyeing each other with sidelong glances, desperate to be the first on point. But once one has a muzzle full of bird scent, the other bends to instinct and training, locking up tight to prevent bumping the birds.

They're not the only pair quibbling in these quail woods. Looking on, Bobby Harrelson, who owns this spread of 850 acres about an hour northeast of Wilmington, North Carolina, and his friend, the North Carolina artist Bob Timberlake, fall to good-natured squabbling over whose turn it is to shoot. Each insists the other is at bat, and it will be this way for most of the morning: friendly ribbing over who should take the point, who should take the shot, and even who should claim a downed bird. Between them, they have nearly a century and a half of hunting experience. And more than fifty years of friendship.

The birds, however, care little for this pinewoods tête-à-tête. The quail burst from a copse of baybushes and turkey oaks, the guns fly to shoulders, and the shots fly through the pines. A single bird tumbles out of the group, onewing down, sailing for the dark woods.

"Uh-oh," Harrelson murmurs. "Looks like you just barely nicked that bird."

Timberlake counters with a laugh. "You calling me a poor shot?"

Just then Dexter emerges from the brush, the bird in his mouth, with hardly a feather ruffled.

"Oh no, Mr. Timberlake," Harrelson says, admiring the unmarked bird in a gloved hand. "I see what you're doing. You're shooting table grade only this morning!"

For the eighty-three-year-old Harrelson, it's a moment, and a place, that seems to distill all the years that have come before. Like that bird in hand, his Genteel Plantation (which he named in the spirit of the legendary quail grounds across the South), with its restored 1867 farmhouse and piney woods and food plots and cypress-edged creek, is a harvest of decades of work, the sowing of goodwill, and the careful tending of wild woods.

FOR THOSE WHO KNOW HIM WELL, IT'S no surprise that Harrelson would end up here, chasing quail across a farm he pulled out of disuse and disrepair. "Knowing land and knowing how to get the most out of land is his creative genius," says his friend and attorney Joseph O. Taylor, of Wilmington. "And it doesn't matter whether it's land for a housing development or a retreat like Genteel, where he's used every experience in his life to build such a memorable place."

Born in the last days of 1936, in a small tenant farmer's house outside Loris, South Carolina, Harrelson was raised by two sisters who adopted him (one he called his mother, the other sister) when he was six years old. They lived on a thirty-eight-acre farm, in a trim white house with neither electric power nor running water. There was little help in the fields. By the time he was eight, he plowed and harvested behind Red, the farm's only mule. At fourteen, Harrelson landed a job driving a school bus, and squeezed in tobacco priming and planting sweet potatoes before and after his bus routes. He bought a used John Deere Model 40 tractor while in high school, but it was hardly a labor-saving device. "I worked the whole farm and went to school at the same time," he recalls, "so that tractor just meant I could disk the fields at night after all the other work was done."

He farmed the family ground full-time for four years after he graduated from high school, but it was too much for a single man to handle. Harrelson married, spent two years in the U.S. Army, and after his discharge, moved to Wilmington. He started a small construction business with a childhood friend. They'd fix doors. Replace screens. Work on a small house addition if the work came along.

But things didn't stay small for long.

Over the last four decades, Harrelson's companies

► From left: A quail feather rests on the grass; Harrelson and longtime friend Bob Timberlake ease up to a point; a Beretta Silver Pigeon ready for action.



have built thousands of homes, sold tens of thousands of lots, and created more than seventy residential and commercial developments in the region. He has shaped the landscape of southeastern North Carolina like few others, and he still goes to the office nearly five days a week. His latest venture is the conversion of the massive 67,000-square-foot New Hanover County jail to a social services complex named the Jo Ann Carter Harrelson Center, in honor of his late first wife. He has given more than a million dollars to the nonprofit center, which charges its two dozen helping organizations just enough rent to cover operating expenses.

So much of his career has been built around helping people attain their own dreams of living at the beach that it's ironic how he's gone back to a farm. "Now, I lived on the beach for seventeen years," he explains. "The beach is nice, but it ain't nice like this."

W

HEN HE FIRST SAW THE FARM-house, in 1983, he could hardly see it. No one had lived on the spread for a decade or better. Brush choked the front yard, pecan trees barely visible

in the thicket. The roofline of the house emerged from an enormous tangle of brambles and briars. When the chimneys came into view, poking out of the scrub—intact, hanging on, almost defiant—Harrelson knew in an instant: *This is just what I want.* The farm was small enough to handle, but large enough to match his dreams.

"Starting on the first day, we went to work on this

place," Harrelson says. "And I mean we worked." With his friend, farm manager, and dog trainer Ricky Kelly, Harrelson pulled stumps, cleared paths, burned woods, planted food plots, and built a trophy bass pond that some visitors figure is as big a draw as the birds.

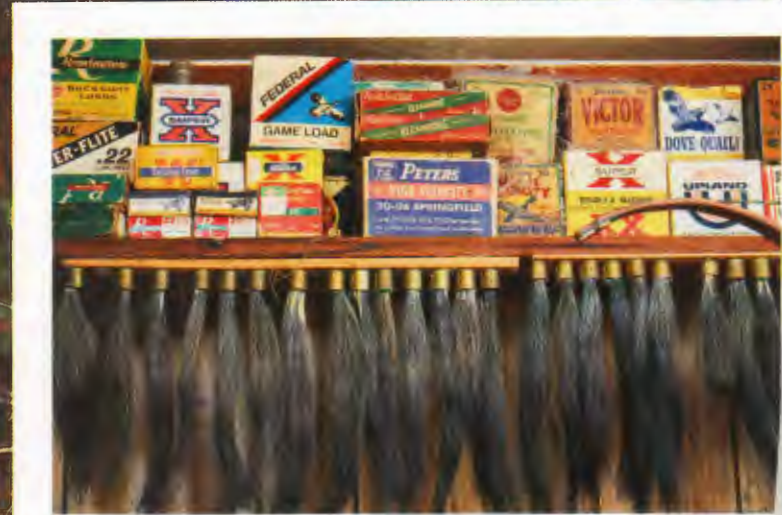
The property is not a typical flat Coastal Plain landscape. The pinewoods are veined with dark creek bottoms, shrouded in soaring cypresses and tupelo gums. Bluffs along Moores Creek rise and fall fifteen feet, affording long views through tangled vernal timber flecked with trumpet creeper and shadbush blossoms. The land changes from the sandy soils deposited by the ancient seas that once covered the Coastal Plain to old loamy ground clad in mosses and muscadine vines.

In the upland forests, Harrelson has poured time and treasure into managing the woods for the benefit of bobwhite quail. The birds need thick cover for nesting, and open fields of seed-bearing plants for feeding, and brushy edges where chicks can glean insects, protected from predators. Sunny glades wink through the tall pines—feeding strips of milo, corn, and bicolor lespedeza, plus cover patches of dense burnished switchgrass. Each small plot of food or cover has been carefully planned, planted, and tended. Each pine trunk is blackened with fire from the frequent controlled burns that mimic the Coastal Plain's natural fire regime, sweeping away tangled undergrowth and giving sunlight an easy path to the forest floor to nourish the woods with forage plants.

"We can't make it into a wild bird hunt these days," Harrelson says, "but we try to make the experience just

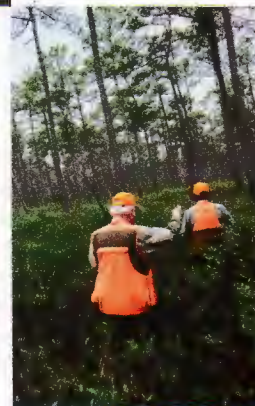


► This page, clockwise from above: A reproduction of an old hunting license on Harrelson's vest; morning in the pinewoods; Kelly's collection of turkey beards and vintage game loads; Dexter locked up on birds.



▼

**"I TELL PEOPLE ALL THE TIME,
I CAN'T TAKE THIS PLACE WITH ME,
SO I WANT TO LEAVE IT BETTER
THAN I FOUND IT"**



THE SPORTING SOUTH

► This page, clockwise from left: Kelly with a pair of bobwhites; Dexter and Emma with a nose full of birds; an antler-handled oyster knife gets the job done; Harrelson and Kelly in the field.



like it would be by managing these forests to look like they did way back in the past. And one thing that hasn't changed is this: We do our hunting out here like the old hunters did it: We walk."

An invitation to a Genteel hunt is a cherished treat around the Wilmington region. Kelly keeps the farm's stable of bird dogs—two pointers, five setters, and a black Labrador retriever—tuned up year-round. Hunts are scheduled at Genteel once or twice a week all season long, as Harrelson invites a friend or two to join him on the property and a few more for a country dinner to follow, often hosted with his wife, Estell. No big crowds. No big fuss. Nights are spent around a massive brick fire ring, where there is always bourbon and often oysters. "Those hours are just as important as what we do in the woods," Harrelson insists. "We're not on this earth to see how much money we can pile up, or how much land we can amass. I invest in people like I invest in land. I'm in it for the long haul."

AFTER THE MORNING HUNT, HARRELSON and Timberlake relax on the farmhouse porch. The structure received its own dose of TLC while Harrelson and Kelly reshaped the pinewoods. The original home measured forty feet by forty feet and had three bedrooms downstairs and two upstairs, with

a fireplace in nearly every bedroom. Harrelson built a large, roomy addition to the back of the house but maintained the historic scale of the front facade. The roof beams are made of solid forty-foot-long logs, a discovery Harrelson made when he tried to level the living room slightly by jacking up the floor, and the entire house tilted. "The house just wouldn't bend," he says, laughing, "so I said, well, let's just keep it like it is."

He was adamant about preserving the historic building materials. The outside walls are constructed of cypress, as durable as redwood and cantankerous to paint. Inside, log walls bear the telltale markings of an adze—proof of the handcrafted care that went into the home's construction. Once, a few months after work commenced, Harrelson drove out to Genteel and found workers about to burn a large pile of hand-cut cypress shingles they'd stripped off the roof. "I almost had a fit," he says. "I told them they better not put a match to anything that came from the house. I stored the shingles in a barn. I wanted to keep everything, because once it's gone, it's gone forever."

The house is decorated with personal mementos and seasoned with gifts from close friends. In the living room, anchored by the fireplace under massive exposed beams, the space is warmed with wood paneling. A soaring bookcase serves as a monument to the Southern sporting life. There are titles by Ernest Hemingway and Robert Ruark and George Bird Evans. An



old wingbone turkey call reposes on a shelf. There are decoys carved by Ronnie Wade from the historic Swan Island Hunt Club of Currituck Sound, and photos of Harrelson holding brown trout in the North Carolina mountains. A Ward decoy pattern hangs on one wall. Harrelson once owned several of the famed Maryland carvers' works, a collection he's whittled down to a single pair of canvasbacks the Ward brothers carved in 1936, his birth year.

His own love of history has been a personal journey. He remembers when, years ago, Jo Ann wanted to purchase one of the stately historic homes on Front Street in Wilmington.

"Heck, I wanted a brick house," Harrelson recalls. "I wanted something new, because I'd never had nothing but old." But at Genteel, his love of the old was rekindled. These days, he says, "everything is built on the Timex plan. You don't have anything repaired, you just buy a new one. That's not the program we have here."

Having grown up with so little, Harrelson seems keenly aware of the value in taking care of all that hard work and good fortune have placed in his stewardship. And that goes beyond pinewoods and food plots.

Once, during the morning hunt, Harrelson and Timberlake get separated in the woods. Neither is as spry as he used to be, and Harrelson picks his way through saplings that slash at his brush pants, moving toward the sound of Kelly's voice, calling to the dogs. He breaks

out of the woods on a broom sedge field, the reeds laid low by winter's cold and snow. Fifty yards away, Kelly steadies Dexter and waves Timberlake in for the rise. Harrelson watches his friend move toward the dog, sunlight slanting through the pines, the charred trunks dark among the tawny grasses like liver flecks in a bird dog's coat.

"My gosh," Harrelson murmurs. "My gosh, how pretty."

In the distance, the quail flushes and Timberlake shoots twice. Harrelson is too far away to tell if either charge hit home. But that's not where his mind wants to wander.

"I tell people all the time," he says, "I can't take this place with me, so I want to leave it better than I found it. Just like I want to leave my friends with a better relationship than when we found each other."

Kelly takes a bird from Dexter's jaws, but Harrelson has already turned away, moving through the woods he worked and dreamed and loved into existence.

"That right there is what I love," he says. "If I couldn't share this place, I'd shut it down. Wouldn't stay open not one single day if it were all about me." 

► From far left: Harrelson on the hunt; the approach to the 1867 farmhouse; Kelly in his taxidermy workshop at Genteel; dinner is almost ready.

4 Fall Driving Tours

For a few glorious weeks, autumn crowns the Smoky Mountains with spectacular color. It's a sight well worth traveling to see – especially when you take a few roads less traveled. This year, consider a scenic drive on one of Sevierville's self-guided fall driving tours. Here are four tours to explore on your next visit.

ENGLISH MOUNTAIN Fall Driving Tour

Make your way along country roads and travel through a covered bridge – one of only a few remaining in Tennessee. Then visit the Battle of Fair Garden site, where Sevier County's largest Civil War Battle took place. Take the hour-long guided tour at Forbidden Caverns (open April – November, closed Sundays) and finish the drive with lunch at the Bush's Visitor Center in Chestnut Hill.



MIDDLE PRONG Fall Driving Tour

Follow the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon River to see historic churches and homes, a cantilever barn and a swinging bridge once used as an important means of crossing the river. Beginning in historic downtown Sevierville, this self-guided tour winds through Sevier County and highlights the history of an important battleground, an early Methodist mission and even the church where Frankie "Pee Wee" King, who wrote the music for the Tennessee Waltz, was wed.



Boyd's Creek Fall Driving Tour

Traversing the rolling hills and fertile river bottoms where the Knoxville, Sevierville & Eastern Railroad (later called the Smoky Mountain Railroad) once ran, Boyd's Creek is a historic farming community dating back to the American Revolution. On this tour, you'll pass by many historic homes, a See Rock City barn and the Battle of Boyd's Creek Memorial. You'll also have an opportunity to walk through Sevierville's Burchfiel Grove and Arboretum.



Douglas Lake Fall Driving Tour

Wind along quaint country roads, travel past fertile farmland, and be rewarded with spectacular views of Douglas Lake. Highlights of this driving tour include an art gallery located in a historic home, a Century Farm, picturesque country churches, and Douglas Dam – which was initially built to provide power for the war effort during World War II.



Please remember, some points of interest on these self-guided fall driving tours are private. Please enjoy their history and the view from the comfort of your vehicle.



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Canyon Kitchen restaurant near Cashiers, North Carolina, looks over a meadow toward the largest granite rock face east of the Rockies.

WEEKENDS

My Side of the Mountains

*A STRING OF SMALL TOWNS ALONG
A GORGEOUS STRETCH OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA
CALL FOR WIDE-OPEN ADVENTURE*

By Nio Brown



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

I hadn't been beyond my zip code in months, it was ninety-six degrees outside, and a pandemic gripped the land. So imagine my thrill as I rolled away from my home in Clemson, South Carolina, and into the North Carolina mountains, the temperature dropping with every mile, rivers flashing up between pines, and no other humans in sight. I was so giddy I literally dialed up some John Denver. But as I pulled into the parking lot at the Whiteside Mountain trail, my heart broke a little when I saw cars filling every spot. I wasn't the only one in need of an escape. Luckily, a friend had given me a tip about a lesser-known trail, one she promised was "a lot of candy for the nickel," so I changed course for Satulah Mountain, taking me through downtown Highlands.

Even though this mountain hamlet is tiny—population 989—Highlands' Main Street is downright cosmopolitan. Anchored by the historic Old Edwards Inn and

lined with boutiques, restaurants, and outfitters (like Highland Hiker, a go-to for outdoor gear), the center of town was bustling. I rolled past it all, though, and parked at the base of Satulah Road, where I walked up through a beautiful historic district with stately cedar-shingle houses rising out of swells of hostas and hydrangeas, all buttressed by lichen-covered stonework. I saw a grand total of zero people as I made my way, but after a mile or so I started to wonder if this could be right. Then the road ended and a trail marker appeared within some rhododendrons, which I followed until I emerged onto a stone outcropping with a panoramic view of the Blue Ridge Mountains so spectacular I burst into laughter.

This stretch of the Western North Carolina mountains—running through Highlands, Cashiers, and Brevard along U.S. Route 64—is full of surprises. Textured with fern-covered rock, blossoming mountain laurel, and rivers filled with trout dashing between sundappled stones, its natural bounty is intoxicating. And while less developed than nearby hot spot Asheville, it still boasts world-class cultural offerings. The Brevard Music Center hosts one of the country's top classical music summer festivals, the six-acre Bascom center for the visual arts in Highlands maintains a wide variety of rotating exhibitions, and the annual Highlands Food & Wine Festival in November brings not only celebrity chefs to town, but also stellar musical acts (Mandolin

From left: A cabin at Half-Mile Farm in Highlands; the lake at High Hampton resort in Cashiers.

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Orange and St. Paul and the Broken Bones are both slated for this year's fest).

At the moment, though, the fact that the elevation had made the temperature fall sixteen degrees was the region's most beguiling asset of all, so I rolled down my windows and headed toward Half-Mile Farm, an apple orchard and farm turned lavish country inn.

"We *do* have a swimming pool," the receptionist said as I ogled the glittering pond through the window. Tucked into a lush garden beside Half-Mile's historic farmhouse, the pool was wildly inviting for sure, but I'd made up my mind that this trip was going to be all about wide-open spaces. After dropping my bags in my room, which included not only a fireplace and a four-poster bed, but also a bathtub the size of a kiddie pool and a private balcony overlooking a mountain ravine, I dashed back out toward the pond.

Built in the late 1800s, Half-Mile Farm began operating as a boardinghouse in the early 1900s. The Old Edwards group purchased it in 2015, added a twelve-room wing to the original farmhouse, and maintains three lovely cabins on the site. "We did spend a penny," said Old Edwards general manager Jack Austin, of the inn's extensive renovation. "In fact, we spent a lot of them."

I passed beneath a trellis of grapevines, took stone steps up a bank of wildflowers, and walked onto the lawn. It was as if I'd arrived at a luxury summer camp.



White Adirondack chairs circled a firepit. In the distance, through a fringe of lilies, a couple cast fishing lines into the pond. Two red canoes rested on the bank. I ran past it all and jumped off the dock.

THE NEXT MORNING, I PICKED UP BREAKFAST AT Mountain Fresh Grocery in Highlands, where as many dogs as people populated the picnic tables out front, and with biscuit in hand, I drove ten miles east to the heart of Cashiers—the intersection of Highways 64 and 107. Here the bustling Cashiers Farmers Market sits across the street from Buck's Coffee Cafe, and

Clockwise from far left: The covered bridge entrance to the Bascom arts center in Highlands; fly-fishing gear at Brookings; Anglers in Cashiers; Half-Mile wildflowers; pottery at the Bascom; Lake Glenville near Cashiers.





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nearby, Slab Town Pizza serves handmade pies and Sugar Cloud Baking Company makes from-scratch doughnuts. Two miles south stands the storied Inn at High Hampton, with its wraparound porches and wood-paneled interior straight out of some mountain dream. But I'd come to Cashiers for Brookings Anglers.

The area's premier fly-fishing outfitter features a strong roster of guides, and one of their finest, Simons Welter, was waiting on the front stairs for me. The only female guide on staff, Welter has fished her whole life but says she didn't truly fall in love with it until she discovered fly fishing seventeen years ago. "When I saw someone fly fishing," she said, "I thought it looked like...I don't know what the word is..." She thought for a second. "Peace. That's it. It looked like *peace*."

As we headed toward a stretch of the Caney Fork, she shared some of her seemingly infinite knowledge of the area, including the history of Judaculla Rock, a nearby Cherokee landmark, and a few of the distinguishing features of the local watershed, which flows with several excellent fishing rivers, including the Chattooga, Davidson, and Tuckasegee.

Things were going well. Until I peeled my banana.

"No!" Welter said. "That's bad luck! I'm not superstitious about anything. *Except* for bananas and fishing." I gulped as she recounted a few banana-related disasters, and by the time I waded into the Caney Fork, I was convinced I'd ruined our luck. Honestly, though, it didn't feel like it would have mattered, because by that point I was pretty sure I could have fished for trash out of a dumpster with Welter and still had a blast.

Only a few minutes later, the rainbow trout she'd been helping me tempt with an inchworm pattern ("Good for summer," she'd said, tying it on with an elegant twirl of the forceps) decided to finally bite, and as I raised the eighteen-inch beauty out of the water, I wondered if this was what bad luck looked like up here.

SOMETIMES SOMEONE TELLS YOU THAT A VIEW IS incredible, and then you see it and it's only okay. Sometimes it's better than you imagined. And then sometimes you go to Canyon Kitchen at Lonesome Valley.

Three miles east of Cashiers, the restaurant stands at the base of the largest granite rock face east of the Rockies, a stone wall rising fifteen hundred feet, and from my table in the garden, the only thing between me and the cliff was a wide grassy meadow.

Most of the ingredients in the restaurant's elevated Appalachian dishes—like the chanterelles and wilted lacinato kale accompanying the heritage pork Wellington—draw from the very earth where I sat. "Is this the same lettuce as that lettuce?" I asked my server, pointing from my plate to a garden bed five feet away.

"Yep," he said. "It's as much farm-to-table as humanly possible."

Chef Ken Naron took over Canyon Kitchen in 2018, after John Fleer (formerly of Blackberry Farm)



Above: Old Edwards Inn in Highlands.
Left, from top: Simons Welter casts; ribs at Magpie Meat & Three in Brevard; a brook trout.

launched it in 2009. With dishes like his heirloom tomato salad garnished with crispy cured country ham, thyme pickles, and a buttermilk cornbread dressing, Naron works a type of magic, transforming seemingly familiar flavors into something transcendent, much like the trick the sunset proceeded to play out on the canyon wall before me.

The next morning, as I stood before a display of antique doorknobs at Underground Salvage Co. in Brevard, it occurred to me that I could easily lose a whole day inside this trove of architectural treasures. But I'd promised myself I wasn't going to stay inside anywhere for too long, so I grabbed a pulled pork sandwich with collards and coleslaw from the funky Magpie Meat & Three just across the lot and headed south.

I was reluctant to leave without spotting one of Brevard's famous white squirrels—according to legend, they have thrived in the area since a pair escaped from a carnival truck in 1949—or sampling one of the local summer-camp-named ice creams at Dolly's Dairy Bar. But it was time for me to return home, where who knows how long I'd be closed off from the world again. When I pulled over on a bend to eat an apple and stretch, the sound of water caught my ear. A river glittered up the embankment. Within moments, I'd climbed down with my rod and hooked a tiny warpaint shiner, a fish so pleased to be tossed back into the water that he inspired me to follow him. Gasping from the cold as I entered the current, it occurred to me that I hadn't been escaping *from* the world on this trip, I'd been escaping *into* it. I ducked my head, and let it wash over me. 



kalahari cross-body in nile crocodile

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A GARDENER FINDS PEACE
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WHERE THE SOUTH CAROLINA TOPIARY
ARTIST SHAPES HIS OWN STORY

By Shani Raine Gilchrist



don't typically shy away from garden work, but this year was different. Maybe the heat indexes were more oppressive—the stresses of the world certainly seemed so—or maybe I flat out did something terrible to make the soil more intent on feeding weeds than my tomatoes. When I'd look out over the raised beds from the window of my study in Columbia, South Carolina, I felt anything but the calm that scientific reports claim gardening brings. All I saw was a lengthening to-do list.

I needed a retreat from the ongoingness of writing projects, breaking news, and my misbehaving plants. A place where the mind has a chance to be still. I craved a visit to Pearl Fryar's topiary garden, a three-acre expanse that's been open to the public since the late 1980s. One might picture a beautiful but strictly geometric maze at one of the United Kingdom's great country houses—such as Drummond Castle in Perthshire, Scotland, lined with formal clipped yews and boxwood hedges. This isn't exactly what one finds at Fryar's place in Bishopville, South Carolina.

His garden lies just outside the seat of Lee County, known for its cotton production well into the twentieth century, where winding back roads reveal modest brick ranch homes. Down a peaceful, rolling street that ends in a cul-de-sac, Fryar tends a garden of topiaries that tower and turn. Evergreen trees and shrubs spread across the property in billowing abstract forms. Pines, junipers, and cypresses loom like sentries engaged in a slow, turning dance—some twisting in place, others bending and curving over wooden benches, fountains, and scrap-metal-and-bottle sculptures.

Fryar himself is an image of the kind of juxtaposition of unhurried affability and industriousness that I saw in the group of older Black men—caretakers and their friends on lunch breaks—at the horse farm my parents owned when I was a teenager. They'd stand around the wash stall and talk straight with each other about everything from

Left: Evergreen trees twist and arc at Pearl Fryar's topiary garden in Bishopville, South Carolina. Above: Fryar in 2005.

at the horse farm my parents owned when I was a teenager. They'd stand around the wash stall and talk straight with each other about everything from

truck repair to rural Lower Richland County's latest gossip. Fryar also knows how to shoot the breeze, and he treats everyone the same in doing so, but beneath that relaxed demeanor is a determination to be the best at his work. As I was growing up, my parents (like most of their generation) told me that as a Black girl, I needed to work twice as hard to prove myself in life. I often struggle with the idea of living up to this as a writer, but the self-taught topiary artist's garden is a testament to that mindset of overperforming in order to be accepted.

When I took a break from my own garden to see Fryar's this past summer, the eighty-year-old had been ill and unable to carry out his regular pruning work. A caretaker was providing maintenance as the garden remained open to the public, but shrubs that had once been clipped into curves were starting to grow green outside the lines. As if the garden were a devoted pet, it refused to completely bend to the will of a substitute while it waited for its human to return and care for it.

I first heard of Fryar's garden about a decade ago and continued to learn about the man through mutual friends and my time on the board of the South Carolina Arts Foundation. The foundation works with the Arts Commission to grant Elizabeth O'Neill Verner awards—the state's highest arts honor, which Fryar received in 2013. The son of a sharecropper, he grew up in the small town of Clinton, North Carolina. He started college but had to leave when he was drafted for the Korean War. Once he'd served his country, he landed in New York, where he worked for a canning company that eventually transferred him to Lee County. When he saw a house he wanted to purchase in Bishopville, he was told he couldn't because he wouldn't "keep it up." It didn't matter that he was a financially savvy and steadily employed individual who could afford the place he wanted. The assumption was that a Black man wouldn't have the pride or standards to keep his property in an acceptable state for people passing by. So he found a piece of land just outside of town, built his own home, and

made the three surrounding acres his creative domain. In 1981, he decided that he wanted to win Yard of the Month. It turned out he wasn't eligible because of his house's location—another rub to spur him on. He went to a nursery in the neighboring county and spent just minutes getting tips on how to create a topiary. That was enough to light the match of his creativity, fueled for longevity by pride and ambition. For nearly forty years, Fryar has used chain saws and hedge trimmers to lovingly train natural materials into obedience, and his garden draws visitors from around the world.

When I again walked the grounds, the gentle curves of the sculptured greenery pressed over the noise of my life. I had no tomato blight to worry over and no quarantine quarrels to sort out for my children, and I remembered that my own relationship with a garden's stubborn wildness, with the cycles of life, requires give and take and quiet love. Here grew the living proof of one man's grit and vision—traits that carry us through decades of ups and downs, triumphs and pain. ☐



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The Southern Agenda

GOINGS-ON IN THE SOUTH & BEYOND

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OPENING

American Soundscape

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

In music and in history, timing is everything. "There is a historical narrative that follows a chronological order," says Dina Bennett, the curatorial director at the new National Museum of African American Music in Nashville. During the time of slavery, she explains, Black people weren't singing the blues. "We were singing about being free." The blues came after emancipation. "Music became an outward expression of how we feel, how we felt, and how we dealt with things." Through the doors at the museum, anticipated to open in late 2020, you'll be able to walk along the Rivers of Rhythm, the circular corridor



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SOUTHERN AGENDA

that joins five other galleries, organized by genre—religious, blues, jazz, R&B, and hip-hop. See the starry fabric on funk legend George Clinton's robe, and glimpse a custom gold-and-navy blazer donned by B.B. King: "He wore it to the opening of his club in downtown Nashville," Bennett says. Seek out the trombone played by the Mississippi jazz musician Helen Jones Woods, who toured the country in the 1940s with the first integrated all-female orchestra—just one of many homages that remind us we've long been one nation under a groove.

■ nmaam.org

FOOD

Alabama

TOTALLY TUBULAR

"The sweet potato is woven into the fabric of Tuskegee University," says Raymon Shange of the school's Carver Integrative Sustainability Center, named for George Washington Carver. Over the course of his five-decade career at the university, Carver developed more than one hundred uses for the sweet potato—as varied as spiced vinegar, hog feed, and ink. Carver died in 1943, but his tuberous legacy continues to branch out. "Our goal is to reestablish the sweet potato as a major cultural crop in Alabama," Shange says. This fall, sweet potatoes are part of Tuskegee's new Farm to Family Food Box program, which purchases produce from small-scale Black farmers in Alabama and distributes food to communities hit hardest economically by the coronavirus. University researchers are also investigating the nutritional value of sweet potato syrup, and even collaborated with NASA to send a modified sweet potato into space.

■ tuskegee.edu

SPORTING

Arkansas

IF YOU LEAVE IT...

A flooded field full of unharvested rice is like a buffet for dabbling ducks, and Luke Naylor, the waterfowl program coordinator of the Arkansas Game and Fish Com-



mission, wants to set a hearty spread for mallard, teal, and pintail come November's hunting season. Naylor started the Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement program in 2018 to discourage fall tillage, a farming practice that leaves nothing but bare dirt. In May, the program received a \$2.1 million grant to expand and pay farmers by the acre to keep some grain in the field and allow sportsmen onto their property to hunt. This year, Arkansas landowners will avoid tilling some 3,800 acres of rice, and the AGFC will open nearly forty new hunting spots. "Duck hunting is fundamental to the culture of Arkansas," Naylor says. "There's a camouflage boat and a black dog in about every other house, and we want to make sure it stays that way."

■ agfc.com

FOOD

Florida

RIPE ON TIME

Fall heralds the return of Sunshine State citrus, but a fresh harvest may not look quite like the vibrant fruit in grocery store bins. In fact, many early-season picks appear green, a natural indication that Mother Nature—especially in Florida's balmy climate—hasn't yet had time to turn them orange, pink, or yellow. "Cool weather will break down the skin and bring out more color," says Louis Schacht, the third-generation owner of Schacht Groves in Vero Beach. Even if they haven't become bright orange yet, plump Fallglo and low-seed Early Pride tangerines are some of the first fruits to ripen across Florida in November. By that time at Schacht Groves, the mineral-rich soil near the Indian River also produces choice Ruby Red grapefruit and navel oranges.

■ schachtgroves.com

GOLF

Georgia

IFS, ANDS, OR PUTTS

Add it to the list of reasons 2020 will go down in history: For the first year since its inception in 1934 (except for a pause during World War II), the Masters tournament at Augusta National Golf Club has been re-scheduled, from early April to November 9-15, and will take place without spectators present. "Even though it's only televised, I will still be cooking," says Vera Stewart, an Augusta caterer who for nearly forty years has coordinated after-parties for out-of-towners each night of Masters week. She'll likely be trading steak dinners for fifty with homemade snacks for family, including her take on the course's beloved pimento cheese sandwich: Mix hand-shredded sharp cheddar, Duke's mayonnaise, and diced roasted red peppers; sprinkle with Tony Chachere's Creole seasoning, and smear it on white bread. Pairs well with an Arnold Palmer.

■ masters.com



FOOD

Kentucky

PASTURES OF PLENTY

This past spring, Alison Settle, the executive chef at the new Barn8 restaurant and bourbon bar at Hermitage Farm, roamed the forests and fields of the Thoroughbred and sport horse farm just outside Louisville. Then she canned, pickled, and infused every ingredient she'd foraged, "so that

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AT THE HEART of it ALL

later we can pull everything out and use it just as your grandmother would pull out a jar of peas she had harvested," Settle says. The result: such dishes as fried bison cutlet with kohlrabi sauerkraut, and grilled squash atop yogurt with dill and wild carrot tops. In the airy, renovated 1800s barn (husband-and-wife owners Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown also founded the stylish 21c Museum Hotels company), the bourbon library includes bottles from every decade since Prohibition, and the old-fashioned cocktail is sweetened with syrup from hickory harvested mere yards away.

■ hermitagefarm.com

OPENING

Louisiana

UPTOWN SPUNK

Amid St. Charles Avenue's wrought-iron-gated courtyards sits a circa-1891 Queen Anne-style mansion that opens this fall as the **Chloe**, a fourteen-room boutique hotel, restaurant, and bar in New Orleans' Uptown neighborhood. "We're in a magical three-hundred-year-old city, but it's also vibrant today with people who are shaping what the next three hundred years will look like," says the owner, Robért LeBlanc. Designed by the local decorator, clothing designer, and writer Sara Ruffin Costello, the Chloe exudes warmth and whimsy. There's an oasis of a pool and garden, and in guest rooms, delightful surprises such as an armoire that opens into a bathroom. Downstairs, chef Todd Pulsinelli serves lively takes on classic New Orleans dishes such as rabbit and dumplings and gumbo z'herbes agnolotti. LeBlanc describes the vibe: "There's no room where you wouldn't feel comfortable sitting down and laughing too loudly or taking a shot of whiskey."

■ thechloenola.com

MUSIC

Maryland

CHARM CITY SON

Frank Zappa was a composer, a renowned multi-instrumentalist, a freethinker, and a Marylander. Born in 1940 in Baltimore to

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Sicilian immigrants, Zappa moved to California by the time he was a teenager, but Maryland made its mark—just listen to “What’s New in Baltimore.” His hometown wears its affiliation with the legendarily quirky Rock & Roll Hall of Famer, who died in 1993, with pride. Outside the Southeast Anchor library stands a statue in his likeness, and nearby, Stuggy’s serves a Frank Zappa hot dog—a cheese-stuffed, bacon-wrapped colossus topped with grilled peppers, onions, and house sauce. This October, seventy previously unreleased recordings come out as the *Halloween 81* box set, and fans await producer Alex Winter’s forthcoming documentary, which stitches together rare footage. “It’s a really moving film, a very honest portrayal,” says Frank’s son Ahmet Zappa, who manages the Zappa Trust. “It’s Frank being himself—and I think people will enjoy that.”

■ zappa.com



CRAFTS

Mississippi

FROM THE GROUND UP

Handcrafted from red Mississippi clay, each platter, pitcher, and bowl made at Peter’s Pottery in little Mound Bayou is a proud reflection of the town Teddy Roosevelt once called “the jewel of the Delta.” Founded in 1887 by former slaves, Mound Bayou was conceived as a self-reliant Black community. Today potter Peter Woods’s hand-thrown pieces look like a natural extension of the area’s hardwood forests: Woods glazes his pots in earth tones, like moss-covered wood; he forms bowls and pitchers into supple shapes that seem scooped from the caverns of an oak tree. The family shop has sat on Fortune Avenue off Highway 61 between Clarksdale and



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Cleveland for twenty-two years and saw a rush of shipping orders this year, particularly for his storage canisters. "Everyone was at home, and they got to rearranging and cleaning and all of that," Woods says. To set a warm spread for the holidays, place your orders now. Like a proper pecan pie, this level of artistry takes time to bake.

■ peters-pottery.net

CONSERVATION

North Carolina

FEATHER IN THE CAP

Jungtita is the Cherokee word for the sicklefin redhorse, a two-foot-long suckerfish found only in the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee River drainages in North Carolina and one Georgia county. The fish was long a Cherokee food source, and "it was prized because it was so large," says Caleb Hickman, the supervisory biologist of Cherokee Fish and Wildlife and a member of the Cherokee Nation. Today the wild population of *jungtita*, which translates to "they wear feathers" (a nod to the fish's tapered dorsal fin), has fallen as low as five hundred to a thousand individuals because of damming, pollution, and erosion. This past summer, Hickman's agency and four others introduced more than six hundred hatchery-grown redhorses into the Oconaluftee and Raven Fork Rivers, and Soco Creek, to boost numbers. This fall, Asheville geneticist JJ Apodaca will use a technique called eDNA on water samples to determine where the fish are, where they are not, and where to release them in the future.

■ sicklefin.org

FOOD

South Carolina

SUPERSTITIONS TO SHUCK

You've heard the warning: Only eat raw oysters during months with an *r*. "Yes, fall and winter are oyster season, but we always say there are three *r*'s in *refrigeration*," says Josh Eboch, who with Jared Hulteen runs Barrier Island Oyster Co. The sustainable oyster farm on Wadmalaw Island sells Sea Cloud singles to some of the

top restaurants in the region, including the Ordinary in Charleston and the Grey in Savannah, even when it's scorching out. High water temperature can promote bacterial growth, but the real danger post-harvest is prolonged exposure to hot air, the duo explains. "When farmed the way we do it, the oysters are continually submerged," Eboch says. The crew pops harvested oysters into coolers within an hour of gathering, so the bivalves stay cold and briny.

■ barrierislandoysters.com



ART

Texas

ROTHKO'S REVIVAL

"I hope the Rothko Chapel will be a place where brotherhood will become a reality, a place where people...will be moved to improve the world," said Dominique de Menil when she and her husband, John, commissioned it nearly six decades ago. Over the years since the chapel opened in Houston in 1971, Texas's harsh sun beamed through a skylight and threatened artist Mark Rothko's dark, abstract murals. Recently, the Chapel reopened after a yearlong restoration, part of a \$30 million capital campaign that will also expand the campus for concerts and lectures. "Our work strengthens the two core aspects of the Chapel's mission: contemplation and action," says Adam Yarinsky, principal at the Architecture Research Office, the lead firm on the project. Crews installed a skylight with laminated glass, angled louvers, and hidden digital projectors—all of which help filter light while achieving Rothko's vision of entering a forest clearing—and the celebrated landscape architecture firm Nelson Byrd Woltz planted a welcoming entrance of birches and holly.

■ rothkochapel.org



An Elevated Oyster Shooter

Yield: 4 servings

Run-of-the-mill oyster shooters in a shot glass throw back fiery and fast. But when Jeff Mattia, the chef-owner at **Pyre Provisions** in Covington, Louisiana, wanted a shooter to savor, he grabbed a bottle of Tito's and mixed in fresh juice and mild green Tabasco. Sure, it's a little fancy, but this shooter hasn't forgotten where it came from: "Gulf oysters are at least two bites," Mattia says. "So our shooter is a big gulp."

INGREDIENTS

4 oz. Tito's vodka
4 oz. green juice (Mattia juices spinach, celery, parsley, and lemon; you can make your own or use any store brand)
1½ oz. Tabasco green pepper sauce
2 oz. lemon juice
2 dashes liquid smoke
4 lime wedges
1 tbsp. barbecue rub
4 shucked oysters

PREPARATION

In a cocktail shaker, combine the first five ingredients, add a scoop of ice, and shake well. Rim glasses with lime wedges and then dip in barbecue rub. Place an oyster in each glass, and pour cocktail mix over each oyster. —CJ Lotz

CRAFTS

Virginia

FOR THE AGES

Before Frederick Walton revolutionized kitchens with his invention of linoleum in 1860, colonial Americans had their own easy-to-clean flooring solution: coated canvas from recycled ship sails called floor-

cloths. There's a record that George Washington reluctantly paid fourteen dollars for one of his—a steal today, considering the pieces are making a bit of a comeback, at least at Virginia's Waterford Fair (October 2-4). There, artist Grace Rochford demonstrates the craft beside a hundred other juried artisans including woodworkers, weavers, and silversmiths. This year, however, for the first time in its seventy-six years, Loudoun County's eighteenth-century Quaker village won't welcome its typical fifteen thousand visitors—at least not in person. Instead, the fair is going online. "We're calling it Waterford Unmasked," jokes the fair's director, Tracy Kirkman. Silversmithing demos? Think digital. Historic home tours? Hop on Zoom. Artisan market strolls? Try the web store. It won't be as old-timey as usual, but the standard of the crafts remains.

■ waterfordfairva.org

OUTDOORS

West Virginia

A WALK TO REMEMBER

"Other sites might get more birds, but you won't get a better look at a raptor than here," says Rodney Davis of **Hanging Rock Observatory**, a repurposed fire tower perched on Peters Mountain in southeastern West Virginia. The observatory sits on the flight path of twelve raptor species, and, after a mile-long trek to reach 3,812 feet, you'll greet them eye-to-eye. Mid- to late September sees the mass migration of broad-winged hawks, the only raptors to migrate in a flock, but Davis names October as his favorite month to visit, when you can watch bald and golden eagles, merlins, rare peregrine falcons, and some of Davis's personal favorites, American kestrels. "It's our smallest raptor and an absolutely beautiful bird, bluish on the sides, with a black stripe through the eye." Even on a day with no kestrels, the 360-degree view of the Allegheny Mountains is worth the hike.

■ hangingrocktower.org

—Kinsey Gidick, Sallie Lewis, Lindsey Liles, Chase Quinn, Caroline Sanders, Dacey Orr Sivewright, and Tom Wilmes

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Fall 2020 • Bluffton, South Carolina

A collaboration between *Garden & Gun* and Palmetto Bluff, the Artist in Residence series offers hands-on workshops with some of the South's most treasured makers, innovators, and artists. Throughout the fall and beyond, join James Beard Award-winning chef Vishwesh Bhatt, dog breeder and trainer Mike Stewart of Wildrose Kennels, artist Dorothy Shain, and others for unforgettable experiences at the Artist Cottage.



Eco-Adventure in Bermuda

October 9-12 • Bermuda

In partnership with Bermuda Tourism Authority, G&G travels to Bermuda for a one-of-a-kind weekend exploring the island's natural beauty through the lens of conservation. Join local experts and G&G editors to take in precious coral reefs, explore peaceful wetlands and verdant jungles, bike through lush nature trails, and more, all accompanied by an abundance of fresh, seasonal cuisine and pristine accommodations at the beachfront Rosewood Bermuda.



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October 31 • South Pittsburg, Tennessee

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FIELD REPORT DESTINATIONS

A guide to adventures in the South and beyond



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BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

Tastes Like...

THE BEST FRIED CHICKEN IN NOLA

Dooky Chase's, Willie Mae's, Li'l Dizzy's, the High Hat. Birthplace of the Popeyes chain. New Orleans has some of the finest fried chicken in the world.

Duh, you may be thinking, or even "Teach your grandmother to suck eggs!" (Did you know there is an entire Wikipedia page about that old saying? It most likely dates back to when so many folks my age lacked teeth.) But which New Orleans establishment not only produces first-rate fried chicken but also has the most intriguing chicken *logo*?

McHardy's Chicken & Fixin', on North Broad Street. Owned and operated by the Mogilles family: father Kermit, mother Alvi, son Rahman. Won one of the National Fried Chicken Festival's top awards in 2018. McHardy's is all takeout, so it's been able to stay open through the pandemic. Katrina flooded it out. A fire did even worse damage. McHardy's keeps coming back.

Kermit used to work in a bank. Alvi has three degrees in nutrition science and business, including an executive MBA. Rahman has a degree in finance from Morehouse and was working on a master's in economics when he thought, *I'm going to be cooking chicken the rest of my life. I don't*

really need a master's.

"My son," Alvi says, "is a master fryer. You name it, he'll fry it."

"Every little golden piece," Rahman says. "It's the complexion—and it's the buoyancy: how the chicken hits the grease. The recipe, the seasoning, is my grandmother's, but I studied frying, on this very stove, for a year under a lady named Devotia. I don't know how she spelled it. I called her Votia. About five foot two inches tall. Checking the internal temperature of the chicken from the outside. You have to be trained to do that. Your tongs are an extension of your hand.

"And it's preparation. Every Monday, I'm up at three a.m. to process a ton of fresh chicken. Cut out the yellow fat from around the tail and under the skin—that helps the complexion, and I'm saving two minutes of fry time. Otherwise your chicken gets hard, dry, and still has a blob of fat—bite into that and it's *fat* juice, pretty nasty. You want that natural poultry flavor. Frozen, you don't get that. Good chicken juice!

"No steroids, no preservatives. *I wish* free-range. I think they should live life as nice little chickens. Mine at home do, my girls: Cheech, Chong, Hey-hey, and Frita—which means fried in Spanish, but I don't plan on eating them.

"I guarantee you I got the juiciest breast in town. I wanted to put up a billboard, a big old bra—size like double-D bra, imagine how big, and I'm going to put two big chicken breasts sitting in it, and JUICIEST BREASTS IN TOWN. My parents thought it was too risqué."

Yeah, maybe. Especially when McHardy's already has such a distinctive logo: a robust rooster, wearing (only) socks. Floppy socks, striped.

Ring a bell for you? For me it rings two bells.

One: Earl Long, the late, intensively down-home governor of Louisiana, contrasted himself with an opponent, New Orleans mayor deLesseps Story "Chep" Morrison, as follows:

"You'll see old Deltasoups wearing a fifty-dollar necktie and a four-hundred-dollar suit. Put a four-hundred-dollar suit on old Earl, and it'll look like socks on a rooster." I am not aware of any other connection, throughout American culture, between a rooster and socks. A book-length biography of old Earl is entitled *Socks on a Rooster*.

Two: Pistol Pete Maravich, the late, magical dribbler, passer, and shooter of basketballs for Louisiana State University and the New Orleans Jazz, was famous for his floppy socks.

Surely, I thought, the rooster on the sign in front of McHardy's is a chicken rich in Louisiana historical allusion. Talk about juice! Not that I wanted to make a big deal of it. But...

"Your chicken has socks on," I mentioned to Alvi. And Rahman.

"Yes. It's eye-catching," they said in turn.

"Your chicken is wearing socks," I mentioned to Kermit.

"A good look for our chicken," he said.

Because...? "He had feet," Kermit went on. "So...put some socks on him."

No reference to old Earl, then, or...?

"The question is," Kermit said, "why no shoes?"

If you're wondering, Kermit made up the name McHardy's. For a newsstand he used to operate. He liked the sound of it. **G**

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for

the

next

few

months.

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AND DOWN FOR ADVENTURE AS THEY ARE.